



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children's Bureau

Final Report

Wyoming Child and Family Services Review

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Final Report: Wyoming Child and Family Services Review

The Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) assesses State performance during a specified time period with respect to seven child welfare outcomes in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being and with respect to seven systemic factors. The Wyoming CFSR was conducted the week of July 8, 2002. The assessment is based on information from the following sources:

- The Statewide Assessment prepared by the State child welfare agency – the Wyoming Department of Family Services (DFS);
- The State Data Profile prepared by the Children’s Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services;
- Reviews of 50 cases from three counties in the State; and
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted at all three counties and the State capital) with a wide range of stakeholders including children, parents, foster parents, various levels of State and local DFS personnel, collaborating agency personnel, school personnel, service providers, court personnel, legislators, and attorneys.

The Department of Family Services social service system, which serves Wyoming’s children and youth populations, is currently divided into two divisions, the Division of Protective Services and the Division of Juvenile Services. Both of these populations were included in the review of the 50 case sample in the Child and Family Services Review. A number of the findings discussed in the final report reflect the fact that child safety and well-being standards equally apply to both populations.

A key CFSR finding was that the State data for 2000 met the national standards with respect to the following outcome measures:

- The incidence of maltreatment of children in foster care,
- The rate of foster care re-entries within 12 months of discharge from a previous foster care episode,
- The rate of reunifications occurring within 12 months of the child’s entry into foster care,
- The percentage of children experiencing no more than 2 placement settings during their first 12 months in foster care.

The case reviews and stakeholder interviews also indicate that the State is effective in preventing foster care re-entries (item 5) and placing children in close proximity to their biological families (item 11).

Despite these strengths, the State did not achieve substantial conformity with any of the seven safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes. CFSR findings suggest that DFS is not consistent in its efforts to maintain children safely in their homes and reduce the risk of harm to children (safety outcome 2). The case reviews and stakeholder interviews suggested a number of issues that contributed to the State’s performance on the safety outcomes.

A significant concern identified through the case reviews and stakeholder interviews was that in many cases DFS tends to conduct safety and risk assessments that focus only on the target child rather than conducting a comprehensive assessment of the family, including the potential risk of harm to other children in the family. Additionally, stakeholders and case reviewers expressed concern

about the number of child maltreatment reports that are screened out of the child protective services system. Another safety-related issue was the fact that the agency does not always conduct an investigation of child maltreatment reports involving children in open child protective services cases. Frequently, these reports are passed on to the existing caseworker and supervisor. Stakeholders did not believe that these new reports were appropriately evaluated regarding on-going or increasing risk to the children in the case. Overall, case reviewers indicated that DFS was more effective in addressing safety and risk of harm issues when caseworkers implemented a family-centered approach that included assessments of the multiple dynamics that are related to family functioning.

Achieving permanency in a timely manner for children in foster care (permanency outcome 1) also was found to be an area needing improvement. Although data reported in the State Data Profile indicate that the State met the national standards for reunifications within 12 months and placement stability, case review findings did not support these findings. Also, the State did not meet the national standard for adoptions within 24 months. Overall, permanency outcome 1 was found to be substantially achieved in only 71 percent of the applicable cases.

On-site interviews found that stakeholders were generally positive in their descriptions of DFS' efforts to establish appropriate permanency goals for children and to meet the timeframes of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) with regard to seeking TPR. However, stakeholders also noted that there often are court-related problems with regard to establishing permanency in a timely manner, including crowded court dockets and/or judges who are not knowledgeable about child welfare cases. Other stakeholders reported that in some areas of the State, there is a general reluctance to pursue TPR at the agency, District Attorney, and court levels unless there is already an adoptive family identified for the child.

Another identified concern pertained to the State's effectiveness in ensuring that families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs (well-being outcome 1). The case reviews found that for many families, the state was not effective in addressing the needs and services of children, parents, and/or foster parents (item 17). While the state sometimes addresses the needs of the target child, the state does not always assess or address the needs of other children living in the home or of both parents' needs. This is a key concern identified by the CFSR. In addition, children and fathers were not consistently involved in case planning (item 18), and caseworker visits with parents and children (items 19 and 20) often were not of sufficient frequency or quality to ensure children's safety and well-being or promote attainment of case goals.

A key problem identified with respect to this outcome was a lack of family focus in service delivery. Case reviews found that services tended to focus on the target child rather than addressing the needs of the entire family. Other problems related to this outcome identified in the case review process were: (1) an inconsistency in the quality of assessments of children and parents with regard to service needs, and (2) in some cases, a failure to provide services to address identified needs.

CFSR findings also indicate that DFS is inconsistent in its efforts to address children's physical and mental health needs (well-being outcome 3). In 28 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS did not adequately address children's physical health needs (item 22) and in 26 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS did not adequately address children's mental health needs (item 23). One concern identified was that some children in the cases reviewed exhibited behavioral problems ||that indicated a need for a mental health assessment, but no mental health assessment was ever conducted. In addition, stakeholders interviewed as part of the CFSR expressed concern about the general scarcity of mental health services for children in the State.

With regard to the State's performance on the systemic factors, the CFSR determined that the State was in substantial conformity with factors related to the statewide information system; quality assurance; agency responsiveness to the community; and foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention. However, the State was not in substantial conformity with factors pertaining to the case review system, training, or service array.

The following key concerns were identified with respect to the various systemic factors:

- DFS is not consistently involving parents as partners in the process of developing the case plan.
- The 12-month permanency hearings are not being consistently held in a timely manner across the State.
- DFS is not filing for TPR (for children who have been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months) in a consistent manner across the State.
- The State does not have an effective, comprehensive, staff development and training program or ongoing training requirements for staff.
- The availability of services varies considerably across the State.
- The State lacks a statewide process to ensure aggressive recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State.

The following is a summary of the CFSR findings regarding specific outcomes and systemic factors.

KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO OUTCOMES

I. SAFETY

Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.

Status of Safety Outcome S1 – Not in Substantial Conformity

Wyoming did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1 based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 88.2 percent of the cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity.
- The State Data Profile indicated that the State did not meet the national standard for the rate of maltreatment recurrence.

Although the State did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome, there was evidence in many cases that DFS was effective in responding to child maltreatment reports in a timely manner and preventing maltreatment recurrence. However, these efforts were not consistent across cases. In addition, stakeholders and case reviewers expressed concern about the number of child maltreatment reports that are screened out of the child protective services system and the fact that the agency does not always conduct an investigation of child maltreatment reports involving children in open child protective services cases.

Item 1. Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment

Item 1 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Reviewers determined that the agency had initiated investigations of reports of child maltreatment in a timely manner in 84 percent of the 19 applicable cases. However, in 16 percent of applicable cases, DHS did not respond to reports of child maltreatment in accordance with established timeframes.

Item 2. Repeat maltreatment

Item 2 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Although there was no recurrence of maltreatment in 94 percent of the 31 applicable cases, data from the State Data Profile indicate that State's incidence of repeat maltreatment for 2000 was 6.29 percent, which does not quite meet the national standard of 6.1 percent. Because the two indicators are assessed using different measures, it is necessary for both measures to meet the standards or specified criteria for an overall rating of Strength to be assigned to the item.

Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

Status of Safety Outcome S2 – Not in Substantial Conformity

Wyoming did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that this outcome was substantially achieved in 69.7 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity.

A general CFSR finding was that DFS is not consistent in its efforts to maintain children safely in their homes and reduce the risk of harm to children. One concern identified through the case reviews and stakeholder interviews was that in many cases DFS tends to conduct safety and risk assessments that focus only on the target child rather than conducting a comprehensive assessment of the

family, including the potential risk of harm to other children in the family. Case reviewers indicated that DFS was more effective in addressing the safety and risk of harm issues when a family-centered approach was implemented.

Item 3. Services to family to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal

Item 3 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 82 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to maintain children safely in their homes. However, in 18 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had not made diligent efforts to provide services to ensure children's safety while preventing their placement in foster care. According to the Statewide Assessment, reasonable efforts are required to prevent placement, unless safety issues make it inappropriate to prevent removal.

Item 4. Risk of harm to child

Item 4 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 72 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made sufficient efforts to reduce the risk of harm to children. However, in 28 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS was not consistently effective in its efforts to reduce risk of harm to children.

II. PERMANENCY

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

Status of Permanency Outcome 1 – Not in Substantial Conformity

Wyoming did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that this outcome was substantially achieved in 71 percent of cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity.

Although Wyoming did not achieve substantial conformity for this outcome, several areas of strength were identified through the CFSR. The State Data Profile indicates that State data for fiscal year (FY) 2000 meets the national standards established for the rates of (1) foster care re-entries, (2) reunifications within 12 months of a child's entry into foster care, and (3) placement stability during the first 12 months in foster care. In addition, case reviews revealed a low incidence of re-entry into foster care for the cases under review. However, the case reviews did result in the items pertaining to timeliness of reunifications and placement stability being rated as Areas Needing Improvement. The State did not meet the national standard established for finalized adoptions within 24 months of a child's entry into foster care.

With regard to permanency, a key concern raised through the case reviews was that only two of the 31 children in the foster care cases had a goal of adoption, while seven children had a goal of long-term foster care. Although this may be due in part to the large

percentage of cases that involve adolescents who entered care due to CHINS petitions or juvenile delinquency, case reviewers and stakeholders expressed concern about the willingness of DFS to pursue adoption as a goal for children and to file for termination of parental rights (TPR) to facilitate this process. Although some stakeholders stated that there have been improvements and that processes are in place to ensure timely filing of TPRs, others reported that (1) TPR filings are not always timely due to reluctance to pursue TPR until there is an adoptive family available, (2) there is a lack of adoptive families, and (3) families providing therapeutic foster care who wish to adopt may not adopt because they face reduced provision of Medicaid coverage.

Item 5. Foster care re-entries

Item 5 was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the following:

- The State's incidence of foster care re-entry (8.0 percent) reported in the State Data Profile meets the national standard of 8.6 percent.
- In 86 percent of the applicable cases, children did not re-enter foster care within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode.

Item 6. Stability of foster care placement

Item 6 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 84 percent of applicable cases reviewers determined that children had placement stability and/or that placement changes were in the child's best interest. However, concerns were identified with regard to placement stability in 16 percent of the cases. The State Data Profile indicates that 87.4 percent of all children in foster care for 12 months or less had no more than two placement settings, which meets the national standard of 86.9 percent. Because the two indicators are assessed using different measures, it is necessary for both measures to meet standards or acceptable criteria in order for this item to be rated as a Strength.

Item 7. Permanency goal for child

Item 7 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 84 percent of foster care cases, reviewers determined that the Department of Family Services had established appropriate permanency goals for children in a timely manner. However, concerns were identified regarding this issue in 16 percent of foster care cases. A key concern raised by case reviewers and stakeholders pertained to the reluctance on the part of DFS and the courts to seek TPR unless an adoptive family had already been identified for the child.

Another key CFSR finding was that in only a few cases was termination of parental rights being filed on behalf of children who have been in care for 15 of 22 months. This means that children may remain in foster care until they age out of care, without a chance for adoption, even in those cases where no compelling reason existed that would support a decision not to seek TPR.

Item 8. Reunification, Guardianship or Permanent Placement with Relatives

This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 82 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to attain the goals of reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives. However, in 18 percent of applicable cases reviewers determined that DFS had not made concerted efforts to achieve these permanency goals in a timely manner. Although the State Data Profile for fiscal year 2000 indicates that the percentage of reunifications occurring within 12 months of entry into foster care (81.6%) meets the national standard of 76.2 percent, it is necessary for both that measure and this indicator to meet standards or acceptable criteria in order for this item to be rated as a Strength.

Item 9. Adoption

Item 9 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Data provided for the State Data Profile indicates that the State did not meet the national standard for the percentage of finalized adoptions occurring within 24 months of the child's removal from home. Also, on-site reviewers determined that DFS had not made diligent efforts to achieve the completion of adoption in a timely manner in one of the two applicable cases.

Item 10. Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement

Item 10 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 57 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had assisted children in attaining the goal of other planned living arrangements. However, in 43 percent of the cases, reviewers identified concerns with respect to this item.

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

Status of Permanency Outcome 2 – Not in Substantial Conformity

Wyoming did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 77.4 percent of the cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

Although the State did not achieve substantial conformity with the outcome pertaining to maintaining continuity of family relationships and connections, CFSR findings indicate that DFS is effective in placing children in foster care in close proximity to their homes and communities unless they have special treatment needs. In addition, DFS attempts to place siblings together, but lacks sufficient placement resources that will accept sibling groups. A key concern identified through the case reviews pertained to an inconsistency on the part of the agency with regard to efforts to seek relatives as placement resources and promote visitation of children in foster care with parents and siblings. Another concern relates to the case review finding that although the agency routinely

notifies Tribes when a Native American child with a known tribal affiliation is placed in care, the question of a child's possible Native American background was not routinely explored at entry into foster care.

Item 11. Proximity of foster care placement

Item 11 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 97 percent of applicable cases, reviewers determined that children were placed in close proximity to parents or close relatives, or placement in another community was justified based on the child's needs.

Item 12. Placement with siblings

Item 12 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 83 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that siblings were either placed together or there was a justifiable reason for their separation. However, in 17 percent of the cases, siblings were not placed together and their separation was not deemed necessary to meet the needs of one or more of the children.

Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care

Item 13 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 74 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS had made, or was making, concerted efforts to facilitate visitation. However, in 26 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS had not made concerted efforts to facilitate visitation.

Item 14. Preserving connections

Item 14 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 84 percent of the foster care cases, reviewers determined that DFS made diligent efforts to preserve children's connections. However, in 16 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that children's connections to extended biological family and/or to their heritage and faith had not been preserved in foster care.

Item 15. Relative placement

Item 15 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 82 percent of cases, reviewers determined that the agency made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives as potential placement resources. However, there were concerns related to this issue in 18 percent of the applicable cases. A primary problem identified was that searches for relatives were cursory rather than thorough in nature. This is a key finding because the availability of relative placements impact upon child well-being as well as on permanency.

Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents

Item 16 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 73 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS made diligent efforts to support the parent-child relationship of children in foster care. However, concerns related to this issue were identified in 27 percent of applicable cases.

III. WELL-BEING

Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.

Status of Well-Being Outcome 1 – Not in Substantial Conformity

Wyoming did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved for 40 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

A general CFSR finding was that DFS is not effective in meeting the assessment and service needs of parents, children, and foster parents. Forty-four percent of the cases reviewed were rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this indicator. In addition, stakeholders commenting on this issue noted that the agency is not adequately addressing the treatment or placement needs of older children entering foster care as CHINS petitions or through juvenile justice. Information from the case reviews and stakeholders also indicate that DFS is not consistent in involving parents or children in the case planning process. Finally, in many of the cases reviewed, it was determined that the frequency and quality of DFS contacts with children and parents was not sufficient to ensure children's safety or well-being or promote attainment of case goals.

Item 17. Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents

Item 17 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 56 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the needs and services of children, parents, and/or foster parents had been, or were being, adequately addressed by DFS. However, in 44 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that DFS was not adequately addressing the needs and services of children, parents, and/or foster parents. This finding is not consistent with information in the Statewide Assessment. According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS provides the services necessary for accomplishing the goals and tasks for children and families as indicated in their case plans, which are developed individually to meet the specific needs of each child and family.

Item 18. Child and family involvement in case planning

Item 18 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 62 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS appropriately involved parents or children in the case planning process. However, in 38 percent of applicable cases, reviewers determined that parents and/or children had not been appropriately involved in the case planning process. This finding is not consistent with information provided in the Statewide Assessment. According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS policy outlines steps for a caseworker to create a written plan that the client and the caseworker agree to pursue together. Caseworkers are trained to develop case plans in conjunction with clients.

Item 19. Worker visits with child

Item 19 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. This is one of the most significant concerns identified in the CFSR. In 54 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of caseworker visits with children was sufficient to ensure adequate monitoring of children's safety and to promote attainment of case goals. However, in 46 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of caseworker visits with children was not sufficient to monitor children's safety or to promote attainment of case goals. This finding is consistent with information reported in the Statewide Assessment. According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS policy requires caseworkers to make a face-to-face visit with all children in their caseloads at least once a month. In cases in which a child may be placed outside their home county/State, telephone contacts are to be made with all parties once a month. A study reported in the Statewide assessment found that only 65 percent of youth in YFS in-home services cases are seen by their caseworker once a month and only 50 percent of children in the in-home CPS cases are seen once a month. For out-of-home cases, the study found that only 7 percent of children in YFS cases are visited by their caseworker once a month and only 14 percent of children in CPS out-of-home cases have monthly contact with caseworkers. The Statewide Assessment notes that although these numbers may not reflect the contacts made by family assistance workers, they are of concern to the State.

Item 20. Worker visits with parents

This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 56 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of caseworker visits with parents was sufficient to ensure the safety and well-being of the child and promote attainment of case goals. However, in 44 percent of cases, concerns were identified with respect to the frequency and/or the quality of worker visits with parents. According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS policy requires that caseworkers establish face-to-face contact with parents at least once a month. However, the Statewide Assessment also notes that large caseloads and vast distances between communities are barriers to caseworkers making these contacts in accordance with State policy.

Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.

Status of Well-Being Outcome WB2 – Not in Substantial Conformity

Wyoming did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2 based on the finding that 82.1 percent of the cases reviewed were found to have substantially achieved this outcome. This is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity. The general finding of the CFSR process was that the agency was not consistent in assessing children's educational needs and providing appropriate services to meet those needs.

Item 21. Educational needs of the child.

Item 21 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because for 82 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that DFS was effective in meeting children's educational needs. However, in 18 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the educational needs of children were not effectively and appropriately addressed.

Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

Status of Well-Being Outcome 3 - Not in Substantial Conformity

Wyoming did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 63.8 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity.

CFSR findings indicate that DFS is not consistently effective in meeting children's physical or mental health needs. A key concern identified with respect to physical health services was the lack of health screenings for children in foster care. Reviewers and stakeholders also expressed concern about the scarcity of mental health and substance abuse services for children, and the fact that children are not receiving needed mental health assessments.

Item 22. Physical health of the child

Item 22 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 72 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS adequately addressed children's health needs. However, reviewers determined that these needs were not adequately met in 28 percent of applicable cases. According to the Statewide Assessment, a Health Check (EPSDT) is required for every child in placement over 30 days. The Statewide Assessment also notes, however, that the State is aware that not all children entering foster care are receiving health screenings according to policy and is taking steps to resolve this problem.

Item 23. Mental health of the child

Item 23 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 74 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS adequately addressed children's mental health needs. However, in 26 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that mental health needs were not adequately addressed. Stakeholders and the Statewide Assessment noted that there is a scarcity of mental health services in the State, particularly for children.

KEY FINDINGS RELATING TO SYSTEMIC FACTORS

IV. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

Status of Statewide Information System – Substantial Conformity

Wyoming is in substantial conformity with this factor.

Item 24. The State is operating a Statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care.

Item 24 was rated as a Strength because the State's information system can identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child in foster care.

V. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

Status of Case Review System – Not in Substantial Conformity

Wyoming is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System.

Item 25. Provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child's parent(s) that includes the required provisions.

Item 25 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although there is evidence that every child has a written case plan, CFSR findings indicate that caseworkers are not consistent in involving parents as partners in developing the case plan.

Item 26. Provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review.

This item was rated as a Strength because the CFSR found that DFS provides a periodic administrative review on the status of each child at least once every 6 months.

Item 27. Provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the State has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter.

Item 27 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because of concerns that the required 12-month permanency hearings are not consistently being held in a timely manner across the State.

Item 28. Provides a process for termination of parental rights proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.

This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because the CFSR found that (1) there are areas within the State where the courts and the agency appear to be reluctant to pursue termination of parental rights (TPR), (2) there are delays at the county level in the process of filing for TPR, and (3) there are court delays in processing contested terminations.

Item 29. Provides a process for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child.

Item 29 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because although there is policy in place, the agency does not provide a consistent process for notifying foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers regarding reviews and hearings.

VI. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Status of Quality Assurance System- Substantial Conformity

Wyoming is in substantial conformity with the factor of Quality Assurance System.

Item 30. The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children.

Item 30 was rated as a Strength because the State has the required standards in place to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children.

Item 31. The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures implemented.

Item 31 was assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement because a statewide quality assurance system has not yet been fully implemented. According to the Statewide Assessment, a recently developed policy to mandate regular case reviews, reviews of management reports, quality control reviews at the State level, and corrective action plans has not yet been approved. Thus, while there are plans for a functioning and comprehensive quality assurance system for the future, currently there is not a fully functioning system in place.

VII. TRAINING

Status of Training-Not in Substantial Conformity

Wyoming is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Training.

Item 32. The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services.

Item 32 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because the State lacks an effective, comprehensive, Department-wide staff development and training program. This is a key finding because staff training and skills-development are related to the quality and effectiveness of casework practice and is supportive of the seven safety and well-being outcomes.

Item 33. The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP.

Item 33 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because DFS does not have an ongoing training program or requirements for staff.

Item 34. The State provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children.

Item 34 is rated as a Strength because the State provides quality training for foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or approved facilities.

VIII. SERVICE ARRAY

Status of Service Array-Not in Substantial Conformity

Wyoming is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of service array.

Item 35. The State has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency.

Item 35 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because both the CFSR process and the Statewide Assessment determined that the array of services is not equal across the State and services are particularly limited in rural areas. According to the Statewide Assessment, because of the small population and vast distances between communities, services may be quite a distance from the residence of the family or child.

Item 36. The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State's CFSP.

Item 36 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because there is an unevenness of services throughout the State due to economy of scale issues, insufficiency of services to meet identified needs, and at times the absence of services. Stakeholders noted gaps in the statewide availability of a variety of services, particularly mental health, psychiatric providers for children who will accept Medicaid, and community-based treatment for youth. The availability of appropriate placement resources was also a key concern identified by stakeholders. This is a key finding because the lack of services reduces the ability of the community to safely maintain children in their own homes and to strengthen and preserve their families. According to the Statewide Assessment, because of the small population and vast distances between communities in the state of Wyoming, services may be quite a distance from the residence of the child and family. Information collected as part of the Statewide Assessment process indicates that many communities lack sufficient options and resources to adequately serve children and families. In some communities, the number of service providers is limited, resulting in clients being placed on lengthy waiting lists or having to travel great distances to access services. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, there is also a lack of appropriate placement options for children which results in children being placed in out-of-home care settings based on available placement beds rather than in response to children's needs. This practice often results in children being unnecessarily removed from their communities or being placed in environments that are more restrictive than necessary to meet their needs.

Item 37. The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency.

Item 37 was assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement because the CFSR findings indicate that DFS does not tailor services to meet the unique needs of children and families.

IX. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

Status of Agency Responsiveness To The Community- Substantial Conformity

Wyoming is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community.

Item 38. In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, the State engages in ongoing consultation with tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP.

Item 38 was assigned a rating of Strength because the general finding of the CFSR review is that DFS is highly responsive to the community. According to the Statewide Assessment, the Wyoming Department of Family Services has a strong history of coordinating and collaborating with external community resources. Stakeholders commenting on this issue generally expressed praise for the agency's responsiveness to the community and mentioned that the agency has shown considerable improvements in this area.

Item 39. The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered.

Item 39 was rated as a Strength because DFS worked with the community representatives in preparing the State's Child and Family Services Plan and in preparing other plans and reports.

Item 40. The State's services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population.

Item 40 was rated as a Strength because the State coordinates its services or benefits with other Federal or Federally-assisted programs serving the same population.

X. FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION

Status of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention- Substantial Conformity

Wyoming is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. Findings relevant to the specific items assessed for this outcome are presented below.

Item 41. The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and childcare institutions, which are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards.

Item 41 was assigned a rating of Strength because the State has implemented standards that address safety, health, sanitation and child well being. Stakeholders expressed the opinion that facilities are held to high standards and that the licensing and certification process is thorough.

Item 42. The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds.

Item 42 was assigned a rating of Strength because the standards are applied equally to children placed in foster care and relative foster care placements receiving title IV-E funds.

Item 43. The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children.

Item 43 was rated as a Strength because the State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances.

Item 44. The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.

Item 44 was assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement because there is no structured statewide process to ensure aggressive

recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State.

Item 45. The State has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.

Item 45 was assigned a rating of Strength because the State has implemented several initiatives to enhance cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.

Introduction

This document presents the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the State of Wyoming. The Wyoming CFSR was conducted the week of July 8, 2002. The Final Report is based on information from the following sources:

- The Statewide Assessment prepared by the State child welfare agency – the Wyoming Department of Family Services (DFS);
- The State Data Profile prepared by the Children’s Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services;
- Reviews of 50 cases at 3 sites throughout the State; and
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State-level) with stakeholders including children, parents, foster parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, school personnel, service providers, court personnel, legislators, and attorneys.

The key characteristics of the 50 cases reviewed are the following:

- 20 cases were reviewed in Laramie County, 16 in Natrona County, and 14 in Sweetwater County.
- All 50 cases had been open cases at some time during the period under review.
- 31 of the cases were “foster care cases” (cases in which children were in the care and custody of the State child welfare agency and in an out-of-home placement at some time during the period under review), and 19 were “in-home services cases” (cases in which families received services from the child welfare agency while children remained in their homes).
- In 36 of the cases, all children in the family were Caucasian; in 6 cases, all children in the family were two or more races; in 2 cases, all children in the family were African American; in 2 cases, all children in the family were Native American; in 2 cases, all children in the family were Hispanic; and in two cases, reviewers did not identify the race/ethnicity of the children.
- Of the 50 cases reviewed, the **primary** reason for the opening of a child welfare agency case was the following:
 - Child in juvenile justice system – 14 cases (28%)
 - Physical abuse – 10 cases (20%)
 - Neglect (not including medical neglect) – 10 cases (20%)
 - Child’s behavior – 9 cases (18%)
 - Sexual abuse – 2 cases (4%)
 - Mental/physical health of parent – 2 cases (4%)
 - Abandonment – 1 case (2%)
 - Other – 2 cases (4%)
- Among **all** reasons identified for children coming to the attention of the child welfare agency, the most frequently noted were the following:
 - Child’s behavior – 22 cases (44%)
 - Neglect (not including medical neglect) – 21 cases (42%)
 - Child in juvenile justice system – 20 cases (40%)

- Physical abuse – 18 cases (36%)
 - Substance abuse by parents – 9 cases (18%)
 - Emotional maltreatment – 9 cases (18%)
 - Mental/physical health of parent – 7 cases (14%)
 - Substance abuse by child – 7 cases (14%)
 - Mental/physical health of child – 6 cases (12%)
- Children in 35 percent of the cases in which the primary reason for contact with the agency was the child’s behavior or the child’s involvement in the juvenile justice system also were identified victims in child maltreatment reports.
 - For 10 (32%) of the 31 foster care cases, the children entered foster care prior to the period under review and remained in foster care during the entire period under review.

The first section of the report presents the CFSR findings relevant to the State’s performance in achieving specific outcomes for children in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being. For each outcome, there is a table presenting key findings, a discussion of the State’s status with regard to the outcome, and a presentation and discussion of each item assessed. The second section of the report provides an assessment and discussion of the systemic factors relevant to the child welfare agency’s ability to achieve positive outcomes for children and families.

SECTION 1: OUTCOMES

I. SAFETY

Safety Outcome 1

Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Laramie	Natrona	Sweetwater	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	9	11	10	30	88.2
Partially Achieved:	2	1	0	3	8.8
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	1	0	1	2.9
Not Applicable:	9	3	4	16	
Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:					
	National Standard (percentage)	State's Percentage	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard	
Repeat maltreatment	6.1	6.29		X	
Maltreatment of children in foster care	0.57	.43	X		

STATUS OF SAFETY OUTCOME 1

Wyoming did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1 based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 88.2 percent of the cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity.
- The State Data Profile indicates that the State did not meet the national standard for the rate of maltreatment recurrence.

Although the State did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome, there was evidence in many cases that DFS was effective in responding to child maltreatment reports in a timely manner and preventing maltreatment recurrence. However, these efforts were not consistent across cases. In addition, stakeholders and case reviewers expressed concern about the number of child maltreatment reports that are screened out of the child protective services system and the fact that the agency does not always conduct an investigation of child maltreatment reports involving children in open child protective services cases.

The findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Safety Outcome 1 are presented below.

Item 1: Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment

___ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: The assessment of item 1 was applicable for 19 of the 50 cases. Thirty cases were not applicable because they did not involve reports of child maltreatment during the period under review. In assessing item 1, reviewers were to determine whether the response to a maltreatment report occurring during the period under review had been initiated in accordance with child welfare agency policy. In Wyoming, State policy requires that abuse or neglect investigations, safety assessments, and case plans in child protection cases be initiated within 24 hours. However, DFS recently initiated a multi-track system of response to reports of child maltreatment. The results of the assessment were the following:

- Item 1 was rated as a Strength in 16 (84%) of the 19 applicable cases (11 of which were foster care cases).
- Item 1 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 3 (16%) of the 19 applicable cases (2 of which were foster care cases).

This item was rated as a Strength in all cases in which the initiation of a response to child maltreatment reports occurring during the period under review was in accordance with agency policy for the track assigned to the report. For the three cases rated as Area Needing Improvement, DFS either did not initiate an investigation of one or more maltreatment reports within the State-established timeframes (2 cases), or did not establish face-to-face contact with the child victim in accordance with agency policy (1 case).

Most stakeholders commenting on this issue suggested that the timeliness of DFS' response to maltreatment reports has improved in the past few years, particularly with regard to reports involving major injuries and domestic violence. Stakeholders voiced the opinion that the new multi-track system is effective in ensuring that priority is given to the most serious cases and praised the team approach (law enforcement and DFS) developed to respond to serious maltreatment reports. However, several stakeholders also expressed concern about the number of child maltreatment reports that are being “screened out” of the child protective services system and questioned the appropriateness of this response for many of these reports. Other stakeholders expressed concern about the fact that the agency does not always conduct investigations of child maltreatment reports involving children in open child protective services cases.

Determination and Discussion: Item 1 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 16 percent of the applicable cases, the agency did not respond to a maltreatment report, or establish face-to-face contact with the child victims, in accordance with the timeframes established by agency policy.

Item 2. Repeat maltreatment

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: The assessment of item 2 was applicable for 31 of the 50 cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether there had been at least one substantiated or indicated maltreatment report during the period under review, and if so, whether another substantiated or indicated report occurred within 6 months of that report. The results of the assessment were the following:

- Item 2 was rated as a Strength in 29 (94%) of the 31 applicable cases (18 of which were foster care cases).
- Item 2 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 2 (6%) of the 31 applicable cases (2 of which were foster care cases).

Item 2 was rated as a Strength in cases in which there was no repeat maltreatment. However, in 10 of these 29 cases, the children entered foster care prior to the period under review and remained in care throughout the period under review. Among the 11 cases in which there was at least one substantiated or indicated maltreatment report during the period under review, 2 (18%) had at least one other substantiated or indicated report within 6 months. In one additional case, there were two maltreatment reports during the period under review that occurred 9 months rather than 6 months apart.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue noted that maltreatment reports involving children in open child protective services cases usually are not treated as new reports and, therefore, are not subjected to an investigation. Instead, the information regarding the report is passed on to the existing case caseworker and supervisor. Consequently, the actual rate of maltreatment recurrence within the State is difficult to assess.

Determination and Discussion: Item 2 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Although there was no recurrence of maltreatment in 94 percent of the cases, data from the State Data Profile indicate that the State's incidence of repeat maltreatment for 2000 was 6.29 percent, which does not quite meet the national standard of 6.1 percent. The two indicators are computed using different measures and it is necessary for both measures to meet the standards or specified criteria for an overall rating of Strength to be assigned to the item.

According to information in the Statewide Assessment, the State believes that the rate of maltreatment recurrence reported in the State Data Profile may be attributed to the fact that the State's data system is "incident-based." This means that if a worker receives a referral in which a child is alleged to be neglected, sexually abuse, and physically abused, the worker might enter this report as three separate incidents. Consequently, three separate investigations and substantiations would be reported on the system.

Safety Outcome 2

Safety Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Laramie	Natrona	Sweetwater	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	8	10	5	23	69.7
Partially Achieved:	1	1	2	4	12.1
Not Achieved or Addressed:	2	2	2	6	18.2
Not Applicable:	9	3	5	17	

STATUS OF SAFETY OUTCOME 2

Wyoming did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that this outcome was substantially achieved in 69.7 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity.

A general CFSR finding was that DFS is not consistent in its efforts to maintain children safely in their homes and reduce the risk of harm to children. One concern identified through the case reviews and stakeholder interviews was that in many cases, DFS tends to conduct safety and risk assessments that focus only on the target child rather than conducting comprehensive assessments of the family, including the potential risk of harm to other children in the family. Case reviewers indicated that DFS was more effective in addressing the safety and risk of harm issues when a family-centered approach was implemented.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Safety Outcome 2 are presented and discussed below.

Item 3. Services to family to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: There were 22 cases for which an assessment of item 3 was applicable. Twenty-eight cases were excluded from this assessment because the children were in foster care for the entire review period or because there were no substantiated or indicated maltreatment reports or identified risks of harm to the children in the home during the period under review. For this item, reviewers assessed whether, in responding to a substantiated or indicated maltreatment report or risk of harm, the agency made diligent efforts to

provide services to families to prevent removal of children from their homes while at the same time ensuring their safety. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 3 was rated as a Strength in 18 (82%) of the 22 applicable cases (9 of which were foster care cases).
- Item 3 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 4 (18%) of the 22 applicable cases (2 of which were foster care cases).

Eleven cases were rated as a Strength for this item when reviewers determined that DFS assessed the family's service needs appropriately and provided or referred the family for services to meet those needs. The services provided included home visits from a nurse, parenting classes, preventive day care, stress management, nutrition education, anger management, individual and family therapy, budgeting, counseling, preschool/Head Start services, and transportation. Seven cases were rated as a Strength because reviewers determined that DFS had appropriately removed children from their homes to ensure their safety. In two of those cases, the agency had been providing placement prevention services, but determined that removal was appropriate when another maltreatment report was received on the family.

Cases were rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this indicator when reviewers determined that DFS (1) had not conducted an adequate assessment of service needs (1 case), did not provide the services identified by the assessment (1 case), delayed service provision to the family unnecessarily (1 case), or did not offer services to the family to assist them after reunification (1 case).

Stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that there are barriers to serving families while children remain in their homes. They noted that the large caseloads carried by caseworkers often prohibit them from providing the attention and monitoring necessary to ensure children's safety. Stakeholders also reported that it is difficult to provide services to families when children are not in custody because parents can refuse services and the courts are unlikely to mandate services. Therefore, caseworkers must have both the skills and the time to effectively engage parents in voluntary services. Some stakeholders indicated that in some areas of the State there are insufficient resources and agency staff to ensure children's safety in the home while a safety/risk assessment is conducted. Several stakeholders expressed the opinion that DFS is more effective in preventing placements of young children than placements of adolescents. This was attributed to a lack of community resources for adolescents and the fact that the agency often implements a "criminal justice" rather than a social services approach to working with adolescents.

Finally, some stakeholders indicated that DFS' approach to serving families tends to be more child-centered than family-centered. Consequently, few supports are offered to parents. Stakeholders expressed concern that this was particularly valid in cases involving domestic violence.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 18 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had not made diligent efforts to provide services to ensure children's safety while preventing their placement in foster care. According to the Statewide Assessment, reasonable efforts are required to prevent

placement, unless safety issues make it inappropriate to prevent removal. Reasonable efforts include both provided services and purchased services. Safety plans that are considered alternatives to State custody (placement in foster care) include the following:

- Abusive parents may leave the home;
- The child may temporarily stay with family or friends;
- Relatives or friends may stay with the family to protect the child; and/or
- Intensive family based services may ensure a reasonable degree of safety.

Item 4. Risk of harm to child

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 4 was applicable for 32 of the 50 cases reviewed. Eighteen cases were not applicable for this indicator because the case was opened for a reason other than a substantiated or indicated report of abuse or neglect and there was no risk of harm to the child. The assessment of item 4 required reviewers to determine whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to reduce the risk of harm to the children involved in each case. The assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 4 was rated as a Strength in 23 (72%) of the 32 applicable cases (13 of which were foster care cases).
- Item 4 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 9 (28%) of the 32 applicable cases (6 of which were foster care cases).

This item was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined the following:

- The risk of harm to children was appropriately managed by removing the children from home and providing services to families to reduce risk of harm (11 cases).
- The risk of harm to children was appropriately addressed by removing the children from the home and seeking termination of parental rights (TPR) either prior to or during the period under review (1 case).
- The risk of harm to children was appropriately managed by providing services to families to address risk concerns while the children remain in the home or in a voluntary placement with relatives (10 cases).

The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The services provided to ensure children's safety while they remained at home were not adequate to reduce the risk of harm to children (4 cases).
- A case was closed without adequate assessment of risk, resulting in a new maltreatment report after closure (1 case).
- The agency did not follow up with the family in the in-home services cases to monitor children's safety and ensure that parents were participating in services (1 case).
- Visitation between a child in foster care and a parent was not adequately monitored although risk of harm was present (2 cases).

- Children were placed permanently with grandparents without an effort to establish guardianship, leaving the child at risk of being taken back into the parental home (1 case).

Some stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that the DFS risk assessment and safety assessment tools are effective and that risk of harm issues are adequately addressed through caseworker training, case practice standards, and case team meetings. In addition, stakeholders indicated that the agency responds quickly and effectively to allegations of abuse and neglect in foster care. However, a few stakeholders voiced concerns regarding the agency's effectiveness in managing risk when children come into contact with the child welfare agency as a result of their own behaviors. Stakeholders noted that in these cases, DFS often does not assess whether there is a past history of maltreatment in the family, or ongoing family problems such as parental substance abuse or domestic violence that may cause risk of harm to children.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 28 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS was not consistently effective in its efforts to reduce risk of harm to children. According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS uses assessment instruments to assist staff in making safety decisions. These instruments include (1) the Safety Assessment, a tool that evaluates the immediate threat of harm and guides subsequent safety planning; and (2) the Risk Assessment, a tool that is used to evaluate the likelihood of future maltreatment. The results of these evaluations provide the structure for determining the level of intervention with the family. However, case review findings suggest that these instruments may not result in an adequate assessment of the risk or safety.

II. PERMANENCY

Permanency Outcome 1

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Laramie	Natrona	Sweetwater	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	8	6	8	22	71.0
Partially Achieved:	1	2	2	5	16.1
Not Achieved or Addressed:	1	3	0	4	12.9
Not Applicable:	10	5	4	19	

Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:				
	National Standard (percentage)	State's Data (percentage)	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard
Foster care re-entries	8.6	8.0	X	
Length of time to achieve reunification	76.2	81.6	X	
Length of time to achieve adoption	32	26.0		X
Stability of foster care placements	86.7	87.4	X	

STATUS OF PERMANENCY OUTCOME P1

Wyoming did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that this outcome was substantially achieved in 71 percent of cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity.

Although Wyoming did not achieve substantial conformity for this outcome, several areas of strength were identified through the CFSR. For one, the State Data Profile indicates that State data for fiscal year (FY) 2000 meets the national standards established for the rates of (1) foster care re-entries, (2) reunifications within 12 months of a child's entry into foster care, and (3) placement stability during the first 12 months in foster care. In addition, case reviews revealed a low incidence of re-entry into foster care for the cases under review. Although the case review process found that the timeliness for reunifications and adoptions, and the stability of placements, were areas needing improvement for some of the children included in the cases reviewed, there were cases in which timeliness of reunification and placement stability were rated as strengths.

With regard to permanency, a key finding of the case reviews was that only two of the 31 children in foster care had a goal of adoption, while seven children had a goal of long-term foster care leading to eventual emancipation. Although this may be due in part to the large percentage of cases that involve adolescents who entered care due to CHINS petitions or juvenile delinquency, reviewers expressed concern about the willingness of DFS to pursue adoption as a goal for children and to file for termination of parental rights (TPR) to facilitate this process.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Permanency Outcome 1 are presented below.

Item 5. Foster care re-entries

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Fourteen of the 50 cases were applicable for an assessment of foster care re-entries because they involved children who entered foster care at some time during the period under review. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether the entry into foster care during the period under review had occurred within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 5 was rated as a Strength in 12 (86%) of the 14 applicable cases.
- Item 5 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 2 (14%) of the 14 applicable cases.

Both cases rated as Area Needing Improvement involved adolescents with behavioral problems. In these cases, the children were reunified but no services were provided to the family to support the reunification. Both children re-entered care within 4 months.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue noted that re-entry into foster care is an infrequent occurrence for young children, but occurs with some frequency for adolescents, particularly those involved in the juvenile justice system. Stakeholders suggested that because the communities and the schools are not interested in helping these children remain in the community, when they are returned to the community neither the children nor their families receive the services and supports they need to ensure that they do not reenter the juvenile justice system. In addition, the probation staff who are responsible for supervision in juvenile justice cases, have caseloads that are too large to permit them to provide adequate supervision once children are returned home.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the following:

- There was no re-entry in 86 percent of cases in which a child entered foster care during the review period.
- The data reported in the State Data Profile indicate that the rate of re-entry into foster care within 12 months is 8.0 percent, which meets the national standard of 8.6 percent.

The case review finding that the two children who re-entered foster care were adolescents corroborates stakeholder observations that re-entry is more of a problem for adolescents.

Item 6. Stability of foster care placement

____ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: All 31 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 6. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the child experienced multiple placement settings during the period under review and, if so, whether the changes in placement settings were necessary to achieve the child's permanency goal or meet the child's service needs. The findings of this assessment were the following:

- Item 6 was rated as a Strength in 26 (84%) of the 31 applicable cases.
- Item 6 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 5 (16%) of the 31 applicable cases.

Additional findings of the case review were the following:

- Children in 13 cases experienced only one placement during the period under review.
- Children in 10 cases experienced 2 placements during the period under review.
- Children in 7 cases experienced between 3 or 4 placements during the period under review.
- One child experienced more than 4 placements during the period under review.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength for this item when reviewers determined that (1) the child's current placement setting was appropriate and stable, (2) the child did not experience a placement change during the period under review, or (3) the placement change experienced was in the child's best interest (e.g., movement from a residential treatment center to a therapeutic foster home).

A rating of Area Needing Improvement for this item was assigned when reviewers determined that a child's current placement setting was not appropriate to his or her needs (3 cases), or that there was a change in placement setting that could have been prevented if the agency had provided supportive services to the foster family (2 cases).

Stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that the agency maximizes placement stability by placing children with relatives whenever possible and by providing adequate training for foster parents. Stakeholders suggested that placement changes are due to children's behaviors, foster parents' requests for removal, an insufficient number of foster homes, a lack of supportive services for foster parents, ineffective matching between children and foster parents at the initial placement, and inadequate financial compensation for foster parents.

Determination and Discussion: Item 6 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Although the State Data Profile indicates that 87.4 percent of all children in foster care for 12 months or less had no more than two placement settings, which meets the national standard of 86.9 percent, reviewers determined that in 16 percent of the applicable cases, the agency had not made diligent

efforts to ensure children's placement stability while in foster care. Because the two indicators are assessed using different measures, it is necessary for both measures to meet standards or acceptable criteria in order for this item to be rated as a Strength.

According to the Statewide Assessment, placement changes are due to a child's behavior problem, the severity of a child's needs, or environmental changes within a foster care setting. For the CFSR, case reviewers also found that (1) children were moved to different levels of care without adequate preparation, and (2) children were placed in facilities that did not meet their needs because more appropriate placements or support services were not available.

Item 7. Permanency goal for child

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: All 31 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 7. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had established an appropriate permanency goal for the child in a timely manner. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 7 was rated Strength in 26 (84%) of the 31 applicable cases.
- Item 7 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 5 (16%) of the 31 applicable cases.

The case review found that the children in the 31 foster care cases had the following permanency goals:

- 17 children had a goal of reunification with parents or relatives.
- 7 children had a goal of permanent placement in foster care leading to eventual emancipation.
- 4 children had a goal of guardianship.
- 2 children had a goal of adoption.
- 1 child had a goal of permanent placement with relatives.

Of the 31 applicable cases, 13 children had been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, but TPR had been filed for only one child. Compelling reasons for not filing for TPR were provided in the case files of 5 of these children.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength for this item when reviewers determined that the goal was appropriate and had been established in a timely manner. Cases were assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that (1) the goal was inappropriate (2 cases), (2) the goal of long term foster care was established without pursuing other options (2 cases), and (3) the agency had not filed for TPR in a timely manner (1 case).

Stakeholders were generally positive in their descriptions of DFS' efforts to establish appropriate permanency goals for children and to meet the timeframes of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) with regard to seeking TPR. However, stakeholders also noted that there often are court-related problems with regard to establishing permanency in a timely manner, including crowded court dockets and/or judges who are not knowledgeable about child welfare cases. Other stakeholders reported that in some areas of the State, there is a general reluctance to pursue TPR at the agency, District Attorney, and court levels unless there is already an adoptive family identified for the child. The possible reluctance on the part of the agency to file for TPR was evidenced in the case review finding that DFS had sought TPR in only one of the 13 cases in which children had been in care for 15 of the most recent 22 months.

In addition, while some stakeholders expressed the opinion that concurrent planning is being used on a widespread basis in the State and is effective in promoting permanency, other stakeholders said that it does not occur on a routine basis. There was little evidence of concurrent planning in the cases reviewed for the CFSR.

Determination and Discussion: Item 7 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 16 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had not established an appropriate goal for the child in a timely manner. A key concern raised by reviewers and stakeholders pertained to the reluctance on the part of the District Attorneys, the agency and the courts to seek TPR unless an adoptive family had already been identified for the child.

Item 8. Reunification, Guardianship, or Permanent Placement with Relatives

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Item 8 was applicable for 22 cases. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had achieved the goals of reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives for the children in a timely manner or, if the goal had not been achieved in a timely manner, whether the agency had made, or was in the process of making, diligent efforts to achieve the goal. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 8 was rated as a Strength for 18 (82%) of the 22 applicable cases.
- Item 8 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement for 4 (18%) of the 22 applicable cases.

Cases were rated as a Strength for this item when reviewers determined that the agency was making, or had made, concerted efforts to achieve the goal of reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives in a timely manner. Reviewers found that the goal was achieved for 14 cases, and in 10 of those cases, the goal was achieved within 12 months.

In three cases assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement for this item, the child's goal was reunification, and in one case, the child's goal was guardianship. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the agency had not made diligent efforts to achieve the goal in a timely manner.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue described several agency practices designed to promote reunification, including structured decision making, Family Group Conferencing, the Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) process, provision of support services, and diligent efforts to locate absent parents. However, some stakeholders expressed the opinion that DFS does not focus sufficient attention on helping parents bring about the changes necessary for reunification. Stakeholders also noted that the lack of intensive home-based services, and the practice of placing children outside of their communities are continuing barriers to reunification.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 18 percent of cases, reviewers determined that the agency had not made diligent efforts to attain the goals of reunification, permanent placement with relatives, or guardianship. Although the State Data Profile indicates that the percentage of reunifications occurring within 12 months of entry into foster care (81.6%) meets the national standard of 76.2 percent, it is necessary for both that measure and this indicator to meet standards or acceptable criteria in order for this item to be rated as a Strength.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, since the initiation of ASFA, there has been a strong emphasis placed on achieving permanency through reunification. This emphasis included several series of grid trainings by state office staff to provide information regarding the need to look at family reunification as possibly the first permanency goal for children in placement. The Statewide Assessment notes that Community training by the Court Improvement Project and pilot programs on mediation, family group conferencing, and concurrent planning have helped achieve this goal.

Also, as noted in the Statewide Assessment, Wyoming established a subsidized guardianship program in February 1999 in an effort to help children who are unable to live with their parents maintain family links and achieve permanency. This service is provided when financial concerns are the only barrier to processing legal guardianship. The Wyoming Data Profile reflects that the number of children being discharged with the permanency goal of guardianship has almost doubled from 1998 to 2000, from 25 children exiting care with the permanency goal of guardianship in 1998 to 48 in 2002.

Item 9. Adoption

____ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Two foster care cases were assessed for item 9. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether appropriate and timely efforts had been, or were being, undertaken, to achieve finalized adoptions. The results were the following:

- Item 9 was rated as a Strength in 1 (50%) of the 2 applicable cases.
- Item 9 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 1 (50%) of the 2 applicable cases.

At the time of the review, adoption had not been finalized in either of the two applicable cases. TPR was finalized for one of the children who was in an adoptive placement with foster parents.

This item was assigned a rating of Strength in one case in which reviewers determined that diligent efforts were being made or had been made to achieve a finalized adoption in a timely manner. In the case rated as an Area Needing Improvement, the child has been in care for 32 months and TPR has not been pursued. No compelling reasons for not pursuing TPR were noted.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed differing opinions regarding the agency's effectiveness in achieving adoptions in a timely manner. Some stakeholders stated that there have been improvements and that processes are in place to ensure timely filing of TPRs. They also noted that the agency makes extraordinary efforts to locate absent parents, cooperates with private adoption agencies, uses adoption exchange listings, provides increased training for staff and parents, and holds adoption retreats. Other stakeholders, however, reported that (1) TPR filings are not always timely due to reluctance to pursue TPR until there is an adoptive family available, (2) there is a lack of adoptive families, and (3) families providing therapeutic foster care who wish to adopt may not adopt because they face reduced provision of Medicaid coverage.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement.

Data provided for the State Data Profile indicates that the State did not meet the national standard for the percentage of finalized adoptions occurring within 24 months of the child's removal from home. Additionally, during the on-site portion of the CFSR, reviewers determined that DFS had not made diligent efforts to achieve adoptions in a timely manner in one of the two applicable cases.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State's Adoption Services Program is designed to place children into a permanent home who are legally free for adoption or have adoption as their goal. The program includes adoption subsidies for special needs children to facilitate adoption. Adoption Subsidy is the granting of financial assistance for the legal, medical, and maintenance costs incurred for the adoption of the child. Adoption Promotion and Support Services are provided through contracts and grants. A portion of the IV-B

funding is used to contract with the Wyoming Attorney General to provide legal support for TPR. Another portion of this funding is used to support a contract for adoptive support services with the Wyoming State Adoption Council. These two program initiatives assist in increasing the number of adoptions of Wyoming's foster children in need of a permanent home. In addition, DFS and the State's Court Improvement Program are working together to facilitate timely adoptions.

Item 10. Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Seven of the foster care cases were assessed for item 10. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine if the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to assist children in attaining their goals related to other planned permanent living arrangements. The results were the following:

- Item 10 was rated as a Strength in 4 (57%) of the 7 applicable cases.
- Item 10 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 3 (43%) of the 7 applicable cases.

In the cases rated as a Strength, reviewers determined that appropriate efforts had been made to provide independent living skills to children who would eventually be emancipated from foster care. In the cases rated Area Needing Improvement, reviewers determined that the agency had no clear plan for independent living skills development (1 case), or that DFS had not considered other possible permanency options before establishing a goal of long-term foster care (2 cases).

Stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that there are many children in the System with a goal of long-term foster care. They reported that these children are served by an independent living (IL) program in all districts and on the Indian Reservation. The IL program requires that all children with an emancipation plan are to be evaluated with regard to independent living skills and to be provided with transition services. In general, stakeholders expressed praise for the agency's independent living skills program. However, a few stakeholders voiced concerns about the adequacy of independent living plans, and of training of staff providing independent living services, and about the effectiveness of transition planning and services.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 43 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had not been effective in assisting children in attaining their goals with respect to other planned permanent living arrangements.

According to the Statewide Assessment, independent living services are designed to assist youth in out-of-home care who are age 16 and older. For young adults who "age out" of foster care and who have been on Medicaid, the option to extend Medicaid through age

21 is available. The Statewide Assessment also notes that prior to the passage of the Chafee Independent Living Act in 1999, there were very few independent living programs in Wyoming. Thus, the existing programs are fairly new and their effectiveness has not been assessed.

Permanency Outcome 2

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Laramie	Natrona	Sweetwater	Total	Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	7	9	8	24	77.4
Partially Achieved:	2	2	2	6	19.4
Not Achieved or Addressed:	1	0	0	1	3.2
Not Applicable:	10	5	4	19	

STATUS OF PERMANENCY OUTCOME 2

Wyoming did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 77.4 percent of the cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

Although the State did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome, CFSR findings indicate that DFS is effective in placing children in foster care in close proximity to their homes and communities unless they have special treatment needs. In addition, DFS attempts to place siblings together, but lacks sufficient placement resources that can accommodate sibling groups. A key concern identified through the case reviews pertained to an inconsistency with regard to agency efforts to seek relatives as placement resources and promote visitation of children in foster care with parents and siblings. Another concern pertained to the case review finding that although the agency notified Tribes when a Native American child with a known tribal affiliation was placed in care, the question of a child's possible Native American background was not routinely explored at entry into foster care.

The findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Permanency Outcome 2 are presented and discussed below.

Item 11. Proximity of foster care placement

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Of the 31 foster care cases, 29 were applicable for an assessment of item 11. Cases determined to be not applicable were those in which TPR had been attained prior to the period under review, in which contact with parents was not considered to be in the child's best interest, or in which parents were deceased or whereabouts were unknown. In assessing item 11, reviewers were to determine whether the child's foster care setting was in close proximity to the child's parents or close relatives. This assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 11 was rated a Strength in 28 (97%) of the 29 applicable cases.
- Item 11 was rated an Area Needing Improvement in 1 (3%) of the 29 applicable cases.

In the 28 cases rated as a Strength, the children were placed in the same community or county as parents or relatives (22 cases), or reviewers determined that placement in a different county was necessary to meet the child's treatment needs (6 cases). In the one case rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this item, reviewers determined that the child's placement out of the county of origin was not justified. Reviewers noted that DFS did not adequately explore available placement options within the county.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that children are usually placed within their communities of origin.

Determination and Discussion: Item 11 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 97 percent of applicable cases, reviewers determined that children were placed in close proximity to parents or close relatives, or placement in another community was justified based on the child's needs.

Item 12. Placement with siblings

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Twelve of the 31 foster care cases involved a child with siblings who also were in foster care. In assessing item 12, reviewers were to determine whether siblings were, or had been, placed together and, if not, whether separation was necessary to meet the needs (service or safety needs) of one or more of the children. This assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 12 was rated as a Strength in 10 (83%) of the 12 applicable cases.
- Item 12 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 2 (17%) of the 12 applicable cases.

In 6 of the 12 applicable cases, the child was in a placement with at least one other sibling, and in 3 of these cases, the child was in a placement with all siblings. Reviewers determined that in seven cases, the children's separation from some or all siblings was necessary to meet the treatment needs of one of the siblings. In the two cases rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this item, reviewers determined that siblings were separated because of a lack of placement resources that accept sibling groups.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that DFS makes concerted efforts to keep siblings together when appropriate, and that the agency requires that reasons for separation are documented in the case file.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 17 percent of the applicable cases, siblings were not placed together and their separation was not deemed necessary to meet the needs of one or more of the children.

Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care

____ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 13 was applicable for all 31 foster care cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine (1) whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to facilitate visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings in foster care; and (2) whether these visits occurred with sufficient frequency to meet the needs of children and families. The findings of this assessment were the following:

- Item 13 was rated as a Strength in 23 (74%) of the 31 applicable cases.
- Item 13 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 8 (26%) of the 31 applicable cases.

The case review process revealed the following with respect to visitation between children and their mothers (26 applicable cases):

- Weekly visits in 12 cases.
- Twice a month visits in 2 cases.
- Monthly visits in 4 cases.
- Less than month visits in 10 cases.

In 7 of the 10 cases in which visits between the mother and child occurred on a less than monthly basis, reviewers determined that the agency made concerted efforts to promote more frequent visitation.

Fathers were more likely than mothers to be identified as not applicable for this assessment because they could not be located despite a diligent search or because visits between children and fathers were deemed to be not in the child's best interest. Typical visitation between children and their fathers took place with the following frequency (20 applicable cases):

- Weekly visits in 6 cases.
- Twice a month visits in 1 case.
- Monthly visits in 2 cases.
- Less than monthly visits in 11 cases.

In 7 of the 11 cases in which visits between the father and child occurred on a less than monthly basis, reviewers determined that the agency made concerted efforts to promote more frequent visitation.

Visits between siblings for the 10 applicable cases occurred at least twice a month in 7 cases and less frequently than once a month in 3 cases. For one case in which visitation was less frequent than once a month, reviewers determined that the agency had not made diligent efforts to promote more frequent visitation.

Cases were rated Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that visitation with parents and siblings occurred less frequently than once a month and the agency had not made efforts to promote greater visitation. In five cases, there was insufficient visitation with fathers; in three cases, there was insufficient visitation with the mother; and in one case, there was insufficient visitation with siblings. A key concern identified by reviewers was that the agency did not assist parents or siblings with the transportation necessary to visit the child in placement when the placement was outside of the community.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that case workers routinely develop a visitation plan with parents, and that when a child is placed out-of-State, visitation is part of the case plan and funds are available to pay for transportation. However, in five of the cases reviewed, the visitation plan did not include all relevant parties.

Determination and Discussion: Item 13 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 26 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS had not made concerted efforts to facilitate visitation with parents or siblings. This finding is not consistent with information in the Statewide Assessment. According to the Statewide Assessment, Wyoming State policy requires that there must be a visitation plan developed for all children in out-of-home placement. The plan should specify the frequency, location, and type of visitation between the child and parent.

Item 14. Preserving connections

____ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Item 14 was applicable for assessment in all 31 foster care cases. In assessing item 14, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to preserve the child's connections to family, neighborhood, community, heritage, faith, and friends while the child was in foster care. The assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 14 was rated as a Strength in 26 (84%) of the 31 applicable cases.
- Item 14 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 5 (16%) of the 31 applicable cases.

Four cases involved children with a Native American heritage. For these cases, reviewers made the following determinations:

- The tribe was appropriately notified at the onset of the case (1 case).
- The agency did not explore the child's Native American heritage or tribal affiliation (3 cases).

Cases were rated as a Strength for this item when reviewers determined that critical primary connections for children in foster care either were "significantly" preserved (23 cases) or "partially" preserved (3 cases). Cases were rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this item when reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to maintain children's connections to their cultural heritage (4 cases) or to their extended families (1 case). Three of the five cases assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement involved Native American children.

Most stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed positive opinions about the agency's efforts to maintain family ties and to place children in homes that matched their race/ethnicity. However, they also indicated that there are not enough Native American, African American, and Hispanic foster homes to meet the needs of the children in foster care. Although stakeholders reported that caseworkers receive adequate training on ICWA, findings from the case reviews suggest that there are instances in which children's tribal affiliations are not being adequately explored.

Determination and Discussion: Item 14 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 16 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency did not make diligent efforts to maintain the connections of children in foster care with their cultural heritage or extended family. Although children's primary connections were preserved in most cases, the case review found inconsistencies in exploring the tribal connections of children of Native American descent.

The Statewide Assessment notes that, according to policy, caseworkers are to make reasonable efforts to determine the identity and location of children's Indian parents/Indian custodians/tribe and notify the Indian parents/Indian custodians/child's tribe by certified mail with a return receipt request of the pending proceedings and their right of intervention. Information from focus groups held with both Tribes revealed that over the past several years there have been no problems in identifying Native American children from either the Northern Arapaho Nation or the Eastern Shoshone Nation. However, the Statewide Assessment also notes that the State is aware of the few times when there has been a failure to comply with ICWA and is making efforts to reduce the occurrence of that problem.

Item 15. Relative placement

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Twenty-two of the 31 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 15. Nine foster care cases were determined to be not applicable for assessment because the child's needs required placement at a higher level of care. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives (both maternal and paternal relatives) as potential placement resources for children in foster care. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 15 was rated as a Strength in 18 (82%) of the 22 applicable cases.
- Item 15 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 4 (18%) of the 22 applicable cases.

Cases were rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that children were already placed with relatives (3 cases), had been previously placed with relatives (1 case), or were not placed with relatives but the agency had made diligent efforts to seek relatives and assess them as a placement resource (13 cases). One case was rated Strength because although relative placement was not considered, this was because the mother and the child did not want a placement with relatives. Of the three children placed with relatives, all were placed with grandparents.

This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the agency had conducted only a limited exploration of potential relative placements (4 cases). In one case, neither the non-custodial parent nor his relatives were considered as possible placement resources.

Several stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that the agency emphasizes relative placements, while other stakeholders noted that the agency's efforts to search for relatives is an area needing improvement. However, stakeholders also reported that the State will attempt to place children voluntarily with relatives rather than assuming custody of the child.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 18 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS had not made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives as potential placement resources. A key concern identified was that searches for relatives were cursory rather than exhaustive.

Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 16 was applicable for 30 of the 31 foster care cases. A case was considered not applicable for an assessment of this item if parental rights had been terminated and parents were no longer involved with the child or if a relationship with the parents was considered to be not in the child's best interests. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made diligent efforts to support or maintain the bond between the child and both of his/her parents through visitation and provision of services that promote bonding. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 16 was rated as a Strength in 22 (73%) of the 30 applicable cases.
- Item 16 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 8 (27%) of the 30 applicable cases.

This item was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that (1) there was a strong bond between the parent and the child that the agency supported through facilitating frequent visitation or; (2) there was not a strong bond between the parent and the child, but the agency made concerted efforts to promote bonding through frequent visitation or services designed to strengthen the parent-child relationship. Cases were rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the agency did not assist with visitation or services to promote the parent-child relationship.

Determination and Discussion: Item 16 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because reviewers determined that in 27 percent of applicable cases, the agency did not make diligent efforts to support the parent-child relationships of children in foster care.

III. CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

Well Being Outcome 1

Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Laramie	Natrona	Sweetwater	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	7	6	7	20	40.0
Partially Achieved:	9	6	5	20	40.0
Not Achieved or Addressed:	4	4	2	10	20.0
Not Applicable:	0	0	0	0	

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 1

Wyoming did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 40 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity.

A key CFSR finding was that DFS is not effective in meeting the assessment and service needs of parents, children, and foster parents. Forty-four percent of the cases reviewed were rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this indicator. In addition, stakeholders commenting on this issue noted that the agency is not adequately addressing the treatment or placement needs of older children entering foster care as CHINS petitions or through juvenile justice. Information from the case reviews and stakeholders also indicate that DFS is not consistent in involving parents or children in the case planning process. Finally, in many of the cases reviewed, it was determined that the frequency and quality of DFS caseworker contacts with children and parents were not sufficient to ensure children's safety or well-being or promote attainment of case goals.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Well-Being Outcome 1 are presented and discussed below.

Item 17. Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents

____ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 17 was applicable for all 50 cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had (1) adequately assessed the needs of children, parents, and foster parents; and (2) provided the services necessary to meet those needs. The results were the following:

- Item 17 was rated as a Strength in 28 (56%) of the 50 applicable cases (16 of which were foster care cases).
- Item 17 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 22 (44%) of the 50 applicable cases (15 of which were foster care cases).

Reviewers made the following determinations from the case records and case-related interviews:

- Children's needs were assessed in 45 of the 50 cases and services were provided in 42 cases. There were 2 cases in which reviewers determined that the services received were not appropriate for the children's needs.
- Mothers' needs were assessed in 36 of the 46 cases for which an assessment of mothers' needs was applicable and services were provided in 31 cases.
- Fathers' needs were assessed in 16 of the 32 cases for which an assessment of fathers' needs was applicable and services were provided in 14 cases.

- Foster parents' needs were assessed in 16 of the 26 foster family cases, and services were provided in 16 cases.

A rating of Area Needing Improvement was assigned to cases in which reviewers made the following determinations:

- Children's and/or parent's needs were not assessed and relevant services not provided (15 cases).
- Children and/or parents had identified services needs that were not met during the course of the case (5 cases).
- Foster parents did not receive adequate support (2 cases).

Information from case reviews suggests that DFS is more effective in addressing the needs of families with young children than families with adolescent children.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that DFS is not effective in meeting the treatment or placement needs of older children entering foster care as CHINS petitions or through juvenile justice. They also noted that children in detention are not getting services to address their educational, substance abuse treatment, mental health, or nutritional needs. However, some stakeholders reported that newly passed legislation in the State (House Bill 59) provides funding for a comprehensive plan for prevention, early intervention, and treatment of substance abuse, which is expected to help alleviate some of the problems experienced in providing substance abuse treatment services to children in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

Several stakeholders voiced concern that there are few supportive services for foster parents. They reported that only a few areas of the State have foster parent support groups and that foster parent's access to respite care is a problem across the State. Several stakeholders noted that foster parents do not receive adequate information about the resources available for the children in their care.

Determination and Discussion: Item 17 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 44 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that DFS had not been effective in addressing the needs and services of children, parents, and/or foster parents. This finding is not consistent with information in the Statewide Assessment. According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS provides the services necessary for accomplishing the goals and tasks for children and families as indicated in their case plans, which are developed individually to meet the specific needs of each child and family.

Item 18. Child and family involvement in case planning

____ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 18 was applicable for all 50 cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether parents (including pre-adoptive parents or permanent caregivers) and children (if age-appropriate) had been involved in the

case planning process. A determination of involvement in case planning required that a parent (or child) had actively participated in identifying the services and goals included in the case plan. This assessment produced the following findings:

- Item 18 was rated as a Strength in 31 (62%) of the 50 cases (19 of which were foster care cases).
- Item 18 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 19 (38%) of the 50 cases (12 of which were foster care cases).

In assessing this item, reviewers made the following determinations:

- Mothers were appropriately involved in the case planning process in 41 cases. In 3 cases, the mother was not involved but should have been. There were 6 cases in which the mother was not available to participate.
- Fathers were appropriately involved in the case planning process in 16 cases. In 13 cases the father was not involved but should have been. There were 17 cases in which the father was not available to participate, and 4 cases in which the father's participation was considered to be contrary to the child's best interest.
- Children were appropriately involved in the case planning process in 30 cases. In 9 cases, children were not involved although reviewers determined that they were old enough to have been involved. There were 11 cases in which reviewers determined that the children were not old enough to participate in the case planning process.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength for this item when reviewers determined that all relevant parties had actively participated in the case planning process. Cases were assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that one or more of the key parties had not been adequately involved in the case planning process.

Determination and Discussion: Item 18 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 38 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that DFS had not appropriately involved parents or children in the case planning process. This finding is not consistent with information provided in the Statewide Assessment. According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS policy outlines steps for a caseworker to create a written plan which the client and the caseworker agree to pursue together. Caseworkers are trained to develop case plans in conjunction with clients. The case plan is to be signed by the parents, workers and other appropriate parties involved in its development. The Statewide Assessment also notes that caseworkers may use Family Group Decision-Making to facilitate case planning, although this is voluntary for both workers and families. Case workers do not appear to use this approach on a routine basis.

Item 19. Worker visits with child

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: All 50 cases were applicable for an assessment of item 19. In conducting this assessment, reviewers were to determine whether the frequency of visits between the caseworkers and the children were sufficient to ensure adequate monitoring of the child's safety and well being and whether visits focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment. The results of the assessment were the following:

- Item 19 was rated as a Strength in 27 (54%) of the 50 applicable cases (16 of which were foster care cases).
- Item 19 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 23 (46%) of the 50 applicable cases (15 of which were foster care cases).

Reviewers noted the following with respect to frequency of visits for the 31 foster care cases:

- In 5 cases, visits typically occurred once a week.
- In 6 cases, visits typically occurred twice a month.
- In 7 cases, visits typically occurred once a month.
- In 13 cases, visits typically occurred less frequently than once a month.

Reviewers noted the following with respect to frequency of visits for the 19 in-home cases:

- In 6 cases, visits occurred once a week.
- In 3 cases, visits typically occurred twice a month.
- In 3 cases, visits typically occurred once a month.
- In 7 cases, visits occurred less frequently than once a month.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength for this item when reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and children were sufficient to ensure adequate monitoring of the child's safety and well-being. Cases were rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that:

- The frequency of caseworker visits with children was not sufficient to meet the needs of the child (12 cases).
- The frequency of caseworker visits was sufficient to meet the needs of the child, but the visits did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (3 cases).
- Neither the frequency nor the quality of visits was adequate to meet the children's needs or promote attainment of case goals (6 cases).
- The child was never visited in his or her home environment (2 cases).

Stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that visitation generally occurs on a monthly basis, although they noted that visiting some children may require extensive travel for caseworkers and this may be a barrier to monthly visits.

Determination and Discussion: Item 19 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 46 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that caseworker visits with children were not of sufficient frequency and/or quality. This

finding is consistent with information reported in the Statewide Assessment. According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS policy requires that a face-to-face visit be made between the social worker and the child at least once a month. In cases in which a child may be placed outside their home county/State, telephone contacts are to be made with all parties once a month. A study reported in the Statewide assessment found that only 65 percent of youth in YFS in-home services cases are seen by their caseworker once a month and only 50 percent of children in the in-home CPS cases are seen once a month. For out-of-home cases, the study found that only 7 percent of children in YFS out-of-home cases are visited by their caseworker once a month and only 14 percent of children in CPS out-of-home cases have monthly contact with caseworkers. The Statewide Assessment notes that although these numbers may not reflect the contacts made by family assistance workers, they are of concern to the State. According to the Statewide Assessment, large caseloads and vast distances between communities are the greatest barriers to caseworkers meeting the requirements regarding visitation with children in their caseloads. The Statewide Assessment notes that DFS currently is exploring ways of ensuring that caseworkers meet with children at least once a month. The Governor and Legislature helped DFS address this issue by approving 10 new caseworker positions during the 2002 Legislative session.

Item 20. Worker visits with parents

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 20 was applicable for all 50 cases. Reviewers were to assess whether the caseworker had sufficient face-to-face contact with the children's mothers and fathers to promote attainment of the child's permanency goal or to monitor the child's safety and well being. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 20 was rated as a Strength in 28 (56%) of the 50 cases (17 of which were foster care cases).
- Item 20 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 22 (44%) of the 50 cases (14 of which were foster care cases).

In assessing item 20, case reviewers made the following determination with regard to the typical frequency of caseworker visits with mothers (46 applicable cases):

- Weekly visits in 8 cases (5 foster care cases).
- Twice a month visits in 4 cases (3 foster care cases).
- Monthly visits in 13 cases (8 foster care cases).
- Less than monthly visits in 19 cases (9 foster care cases).
- No visits in 2 cases (2 foster care cases).

In 9 cases, reviewers determined that caseworker visits with mothers did not focus on issues pertaining to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment.

Reviewers identified the following findings with regard to the frequency of caseworker visits with fathers (36 applicable cases):

- Weekly visits in 4 cases (2 foster care cases).
- Twice a month visits in 1 case.
- Monthly visits in 3 cases (2 foster care cases).
- Less than month visits in 19 cases (10 foster care cases).
- No visits in 9 cases (7 foster care cases)

In 21 cases, reviewers determined that caseworker visits with fathers did not focus on issue pertaining to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment.

Cases were rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of visits with parents was sufficient to y to meet the needs of parents and children, monitor children’s safety, and/or promote attainment of case goals. Cases were rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that visits were not sufficiently frequent to meet the needs of parents and children or did not focus on substantive issues pertaining to the case.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 44 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the frequency and/or quality of caseworker visits with parents were not sufficient to ensure children’s safety and well-being or to promote attainment of case goals. These findings are not consistent with State policy as noted in the Statewide Assessment. According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS policy requires that caseworkers establish face-to-face contact with parents at least once a month. However, the Statewide Assessment also notes that large caseloads and vast distances between communities are barriers to caseworkers making these contacts in accordance with State policy.

Well Being Outcome 2

Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Laramie	Natrona	Sweetwater	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	13	8	11	32	82.1
Partially Achieved:	3	1	1	5	12.8
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	2	0	2	5.1
Not Applicable:	4	5	2	11	

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 2

Wyoming did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2 based on the finding that 82.1 percent of the cases reviewed were found to have substantially achieved this outcome. This is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity. The general finding of the CFSR process was that the agency is not consistent in assessing children's educational needs and providing appropriate services to meet those needs.

The findings for the item assessed for Well Being Outcome 2 are presented below.

Item 21. Educational needs of the child

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 21 was applicable for 39 of the 50 cases reviewed. Cases that were not applicable for assessment were foster care cases in which the children were too young to be enrolled in school or preschool, or in-home services cases in which the children did not have needs pertaining to education-related issues. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether children's educational needs were appropriately assessed and whether services were provided to meet those needs. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 21 was rated as a Strength in 32 (82%) of the 39 applicable cases (24 of which were foster care cases).
- Item 21 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 7 (18%) of the 39 applicable cases (4 of which were foster care cases).

Reviewers reported the following additional findings with respect to this item:

- Services were provided to meet educational needs in 32 of the 39 applicable cases; services were not provided in 7 cases.
- The educational services received included special education, Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) meetings, educational advocacy, tutoring, and early intervention.
- In 10 cases, the children experienced multiple school changes as a result of placement changes in foster care.

Cases were rated as a Strength for this item when reviewers determined that the agency had assessed the children's educational needs and had provided services to meet those needs (if necessary). Cases were assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement when services were not provided to address identified educational needs (6 cases), or children's educational needs were not appropriately assessed (1 case).

Stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed mixed opinions regarding DFS' effectiveness in meeting children's educational needs. Some stakeholders mentioned that educators are mandatory members of MDT teams and that caseworkers participate in IEP

meetings and work closely with schools. However, other stakeholders felt that the issue of education is “noticeably absent” from MDT treatment planning and that there is not a strong collaboration between DFS and educational agencies and institutions.

Determination and Discussion: Item 21 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because reviewers determined that in 18 percent of the cases, the educational needs of children were not effectively and appropriately addressed.

Well-Being Outcome 3

Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Laramie	Natrona	Sweetwater	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	12	9	9	30	63.8
Partially Achieved:	3	2	3	8	17.0
Not Achieved or Addressed:	3	5	1	9	19.1
Not Applicable:	2	0	1	3	

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 3

Wyoming did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 63.8 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity.

CFSR findings indicate that DFS is not consistently effective in meeting children’s physical or mental health needs. A key concern identified with respect to physical health services was that some children in foster care were not receiving health screenings on a routine basis. Reviewers and stakeholders also expressed concern about the scarcity of mental health and substance abuse services for children, and the fact that some children are not receiving needed mental health assessments.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Well-Being Outcome 3 are presented and discussed below.

Item 22. Physical health of the child

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 22 was applicable for 39 of the 50 cases reviewed. Cases that were not applicable for this assessment were in-home services cases for which no physical health issues were identified. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether (1) children's physical health needs had been appropriately assessed, and (2) the services designed to meet those needs had been, or were being, provided. The findings of this assessment were the following:

- Item 22 was rated as a Strength in 28 (72%) of the 39 applicable cases (21 of which were foster care cases).
- Item 22 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 11 (28%) of the 39 applicable cases (10 of which were foster care cases).

In general, cases were rated as a Strength when the children's health needs were routinely assessed and services provided as needed. Cases were rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Health screenings or preventive health services were not provided (9 foster care cases).
- Needs for specific health care services were not met (1 foster care case and 1 in-home services case).

Stakeholders commenting on this issue noted that health care provisions, including EPSDT, are mandated for children in foster care. Most stakeholders expressed the opinion that children physical health care needs are being met by the agency and that foster parents are effective in ensuring that children get the medical services they need. Some stakeholders reported, however, that not all dental and medical providers in the State will accept Wyoming Medicaid and this can make it difficult to access physical health services.

Determination and Discussion: Item 22 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 28 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS was not adequately addressing the health needs of children in foster care and in-home services cases. This finding was not consistent with information from the Statewide Assessment. According to the Statewide Assessment, a Health Check (EPSDT) is required for every child in placement over 30 days. In addition, documentation of the information received from the Health Check is to be kept in the case file and included in the case narrative. The Statewide Assessment also notes, however, that the State is aware that not all children entering foster care are receiving health screenings according to policy and is taking steps to resolve this problem.

Item 23. Mental health of the child

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 23 was applicable for 43 of the 50 cases reviewed. Cases that were not applicable were foster care cases in which the child was too young for an assessment of mental health needs, and in-home services cases in which the children's mental health needs were not an issue. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether (1) mental health needs had been appropriately assessed and, (2) appropriate services to address those needs had been offered or provided. The findings of this assessment were the following:

- Item 23 was rated as a Strength in 32 (74%) of the 43 applicable cases (21 of which were foster care cases).
- Item 23 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 11 (26%) of the 43 applicable cases (7 of which were foster care cases).

For the 43 applicable cases, reviewers noted that children's mental health needs were "significantly assessed" in 35 cases, "partially assessed" in 4 cases, and "not at all assessed" in 4 cases. Reviewers also reported that mental health needs were "significantly met" in 29 cases, "partially met" in 7 cases, and "not at all" met in 3 cases. There were four cases in which the mental health assessment did not identify service needs.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength if mental health needs were "significantly" assessed and the children's mental health needs were "significantly" met. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that assessments and services were provided only partially or not at all. The following problems were found in cases rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this item:

- Child's mental health needs or behavioral issues were not addressed (7 cases).
- Child had an identified service need that was not met (3 cases).
- The duration of services was not sufficient to meet the child's needs (1 case).

Stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed concern about the scarcity of mental health services and lack of infrastructure to provide these services to children, particularly to the many children in the juvenile justice system who have mental health issues. Stakeholders noted that there is a scarcity of psychiatric facilities, community psychiatric services, inpatient beds, and in-home mental health services, often resulting in long waiting lists for services. In addition, they reported that it is difficult to find high quality counselors, especially sexual abuse counselors. Finally, stakeholders voiced the opinion that mental health services are becoming scarcer as funding has been reduced and Medicaid has limited the services that can be reimbursed. At the same time, however, the number of children needing mental health services is growing.

Several stakeholders reported that children's substance abuse treatment needs are not being adequately addressed. The number of inpatient substance abuse programs is limited and they are generally not available in the community. However, stakeholders expressed the opinion that House Bill 59 will enhance the availability of substance abuse services.

Determination and Discussion: Item 23 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 26 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DFS was not adequately addressing children's mental health needs. According to the Statewide Assessment, the Behavioral Health Care for Kids Task Force (BHC) was formed in an effort to address the mental health needs of children in placement. This committee is comprised of representatives from the Department of Health, Department of Family Services, the Department of Education, and other interested parties, including consumer advocates and health care providers. This committee's focus is addressing the full continuum of behavioral health care being accessed by children. One of the most significant things to come from this effort has been the use of Medicaid dollars to pay for acute care and extended care of children needing in-patient hospitalization for mental health reasons. This committee also is focusing attention on the need for mental health centers to expand their services to the rural communities of Wyoming. The Statewide Assessment reports that information from focus groups indicates that some Wyoming communities have limited mental health services available to serve children and families.

SECTION 2: SYSTEMIC FACTORS

IV. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3	4X

STATUS OF STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

Wyoming is in substantial conformity with the factor of Statewide Information System. Findings with respect to the item assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 24. State is operating a Statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

This item has been rated as a Strength because information gathered during the CFSR indicates that the State's information system can identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child in foster care.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS implemented the Wyoming Children Assistance and Protection System (WYCAPS) on June 1, 1998. All of the data elements from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) are captured in WYCAPS database fields and are highlighted in the system as Federally-mandated information. WYCAPS has recently undergone an AFCARS and SACWIS Federal review and DFS is addressing areas identified as deficient.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that WYCAPS is an incident-based case management approach, which allows the system to keep information as it stands in a point in time instead of overwriting information or having to keep track of information with date ranges (effective dating). WYCAPS captures information on out-of-home placements ranging from family foster care to residential

treatment centers and tracks the authority under which each child is placed (such as voluntary or protective custody), the dates of placement, and the reason for "closing" a placement. WYCAPS also contains information on the case plan and case goal. The system sends an alert when a case plan is needed as defined by regulation and policy.

Data on each individual incident, including relevant demographic information on all parties involved in the incident, are collected and entered by caseworkers, who receive 16 hours of training on WYCAPS. WYCAPS generates a variety of reports, including reports that assist management in monitoring the investigation of child abuse and neglect allegations and workflow, system reports, provider information, quality assurance, case management, Federal reporting, and Ad Hoc reports. One concern noted in the Statewide Assessment is that data are not always entered completely and accurately by caseworkers, which raises concerns regarding the data quality.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue agreed that WYCAPS has the capacity to identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for all children in foster care. Stakeholders identified additional positive features of WYCAPS, including the following:

- It generates reports that can be used to support decision-making at the administrative and management levels and are meaningful to front line caseworkers.
- The support from the technical assistance providers is effective.
- The training provided is adequate.
- It includes all AFCARS and NCANDS data elements.
- It provides alerts for caseworkers to let them know when required actions are needed.

Several stakeholders, however, also expressed the following concerns about the system.

- Caseworkers are not always entering all of the required data into WYCAPS.
- WYCAPS does not meet the needs of the juvenile justice program.
- WYCAPS is not linked to programs outside of DFS to enhance information sharing.
- The system is frequently down and/or slow and is not user-friendly (multiple screens must be accessed to enter information into the system making it time-consuming to enter data).
- Training is not sufficient and there is a lack of on-site support.
- The system does not provide case history information prior to May 1998.

V. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2X	3	4

STATUS OF CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

Wyoming is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System. Findings with regard to specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 25. Provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child's parent(s) that includes the required provisions.

____ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Item 25 has been assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement because, although there is evidence that every child has a written case plan, CFSR findings indicate that DFS caseworkers are not consistently involving parents as partners in the case planning process.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, Wyoming rules and DFS policy require a written case plans for all open cases. For non-placement cases, case plans must be completed within 30 days of substantiation (CPS) or upon the completion of the assessment (YFS). For placement cases, case plans must be completed and signed for each child within 60 days of out-of-home placement or within 30 days of the conclusion of the investigation or assessment, whichever occurs first. In addition, DFS policy requires that the client be an active partner in identifying and prioritizing the issues to be addressed in the case plan and that goals and objectives are to be established in conjunction with the client. Family group decision-making may be used, but is not mandated.

According to the Statewide Assessment, a IV-E audit conducted by DFS in 2001 showed that each record reviewed had a completed, up-to-date case plan and that caseworkers were involving parents in the development of the case plan. Because these files were selected from a random sample throughout the State, DFS believes that workers in each DFS local office in the State are completing case plans in accordance with policy requirements. However, the Statewide Assessment also reports that a recent review of data concerning required case plan data entry into WYCAPS revealed that in some instances, the case plans that have been developed and placed in client files have not been entered into WYCAPS.

The Statewide Assessment identifies the following concerns regarding the case planning process:

- Caseworkers are not in agreement that the current case plan format is effective. Some believe it is an excellent tool and others believe that it needs to be improved by changing the order of goals and making the language easier for families to understand.
- Caseworkers need training on how to better engage families in the case planning process.
- Caseworkers need training on developing case plans that effectively address safety, permanency, and well being.

Although the CFSR case reviews indicated that in 38 percent of the cases, parents and children were not involved in the case planning process, many stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that parents and caregivers are usually included in the process. A few stakeholders identified Family Group Decision Making as a particularly effective approach for involving parents in the case planning process. However, stakeholders and case reviewers noted that this approach is not routinely implemented.

Item 26. Provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review.

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

This item was rated as a Strength because the CFSR found that DFS provides a periodic administrative review on the status of each child at least once every 6 months.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, DFS' policy and State statute and rules mandate that each child in foster care must be reviewed by the court or administrative body at least once every 6 months. If the 6-month review is an administrative review, it must be open to the parents and child, if old enough (generally, 12 years of age or older). An administrative review panel consists of at least one person who is not responsible for the case management or delivery of services to either the child or the parents. The 6-month review is designed to determine progress toward achieving the permanency goal through meeting the following objectives:

- Determining the continuing necessity for the placement.
- Determining the appropriateness and safety of the placement.
- Determining the extent of compliance with the case/permanency plan.
- Determining the extent of the progress made toward alleviating or mitigating the causes necessitating the placement in foster care.
- Estimating the date when the child may be safely returned home or placed in another permanent home.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the findings of a review of data from WYCAPS were that 83 percent of a total of 760 children currently in out-of-home placement for 6 months or more have had a review at least every 6 months. However, it was noted

that this percentage may not reflect court reviews that were held in lieu of administrative reviews. In addition, the accuracy of this data depends on caseworkers consistently updating this field in WYCAPS.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed differing opinions. Stakeholders in one of the sites included in the onsite review noted that 6-month reviews are conducted in a timely manner, while stakeholders in the other sites expressed the opinion that reviews are not held in a timely manner. All stakeholders, however, agreed that WYCAPS assists in promoting 6-month reviews through an "alert" system that informs the worker that the time for the review is near.

Item 27. Provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the State has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter.

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

This item was assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement because the required 12-month permanency hearings are not being consistently held in a timely manner across the State.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, statutorily, a permanency hearing is held in court 12 months from the date of the child's removal from the home, and not less than once every 12 months thereafter. WYCAPS has the ability to track permanency hearings and the outcomes, but caseworkers are not entering the necessary information on a consistent basis.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue reported that DFS has procedures in place for holding 12-month permanency hearings and that WYCAPS promotes timely hearings through an alert system. However, while some stakeholders expressed the opinion that permanency hearings are held in a timely manner, others noted that there are delays in scheduling hearings due to the workload of District Attorneys and judges. In addition, some stakeholders indicated that delays occur because the judges' interpretations of the ASFA legislation often differ from the agency's interpretation.

Despite these problems, many stakeholders reported that improvements have been made in the State that are intended to enhance the timeliness of permanency hearings, including adding a judge to the juvenile court and the development of the Bench Book by the Court Improvement Project, a project that received high praise from many stakeholders. Several noted that permanency hearings appear to be occurring in a timely manner for children recently entering care as compared to children who have been in care for longer periods of time.

Item 28. Provides a process for termination of parental rights proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because CFSR findings indicate that (1) there are areas within the State where the courts and the agency appear to be reluctant to pursue termination of parental rights (TPR), (2) there are delays at the county level in the process of filing for TPR, and (3) there are court delays in processing contested terminations.

According to the Statewide Assessment, since the inception of ASFA, there has been a strong emphasis placed on TPR for children who have been in care for 15 of the most recent 22 months. This emphasis included several series of "grid" trainings by State office staff to provide information emphasizing the need to either terminate the parental right of these children or have a compelling reason not to terminate. State office staff have been very involved in helping DFS staff become aware of children who are about to reach the fifteenth month. A database is sent out monthly to district managers identifying these children.

The Statewide Assessment acknowledges, however, that at times the county or District Attorneys are not filing TPR petitions in a timely manner. The Statewide Assessment suggests that county or District Attorneys are reluctant to file for TPR because they believe that judges will not agree to seek TPR unless an available adoptive home is identified (yet often, the agency will not seek an adoptive home until TPR has been attained). Another concern raised in the Statewide Assessment was that the time required to achieve TPR is extremely long. It was noted that the State is currently working through the Court Improvement Project to make improvements in this area. In addition, an attorney from the Attorney General's Office is available on request to assist districts in filing for TPR.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that although ASFA timeframes are followed in most areas of the State, it is not consistent across the State. Some stakeholders reported that there are areas within the State in which the courts and the District Attorney's offices are reluctant to pursue TPR if there is no family already available to adopt the child. Other stakeholders suggested that delays in achieving TPR are due to (1) the fact that judges are not moving child protective cases to the forefront; (2) the time it takes to produce affidavits; (3) court backlogs; and (4) contested TPRs that require jury trials. Stakeholders noted that the communication and cooperation between DFS and the District Attorney's office is not sufficient to promote timely resolution of issues pertaining to achieving TPR in accordance with ASFA provisions. Stakeholders noted that the District Attorney's office tends to resist TPR filing or second-guess agency recommendations. In addition, stakeholders reported that TPR has not been attained for any children on the one Native American Reservation located in the State.

Item 29. Provides a process for foster parents, preadoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in any review or hearing held with respect to the child.

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

This item was assigned a rating of area needing improvement because although there is a policy in place, the agency does not provide a consistent process for notifying foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers regarding reviews and hearings.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS policy requires that a foster parent, preadoptive parent, or relative caring for a child is given notice of, and an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing involving the child. However, there is no formal policy as to how the caregiver is to be notified and there is no report generated by WYCAPS to monitor this practice. The Statewide Assessment notes that foster parents are routinely provided notice of review hearings, but most choose not to participate or attend.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that foster parents, preadoptive parents, and relative caregivers are generally notified of reviews and hearings. However, stakeholders also reported that there is no mechanism to verify that such notice has been given or received. According to State policy, notification can be done verbally or through written communication, depending on what the caseworker decides to do.

Some stakeholders stated that foster parents and pre-adoptive parents are encouraged to participate in reviews by judges and agency staff, although others voiced the opinion that the MDT process is not inclusive and is intimidating for parents and caregivers. In one site, stakeholders commented that foster parents feel welcome in hearings and that judges poll everyone present in the court to ensure input.

VI. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3X	4

STATUS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Wyoming is in substantial conformity with the factor of Quality Assurance System. Findings with respect to the specific items assess for this factor are presented below.

Item 30. The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children.

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

This item is rated as a Strength because the State has the required standards in place to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children.

According to the Statewide Assessment, caseworkers are responsible for following State laws, rules, and policies in the delivery of services to children and families to ensure the safety and health of children. Among their responsibilities, caseworkers are to monitor foster homes to determine whether they comply with all certification standards. Caseworkers also are responsible for ensuring that children in foster care for more than 30 days receive a health check. Caseworkers must document in the case plan any recommendations of medical need or follow-up. The medical needs of a child must be reviewed as part of the 6- and 12-month placement/permanency review to ensure that the medical needs of the child are being met while in the care of DFS.

The Statewide Assessment notes that DFS employs a contract care monitor who is responsible for monitoring contract providers in the State. This position has the responsibility for ensuring that contract providers meet standards for certification. Contract providers of foster care must provide monthly updates to caseworkers and report any incidents involving a child's health and safety. These monthly reports are reviewed by caseworkers and followed-up if needed. However, the Statewide Assessment also notes that DFS has limited resources and manpower to monitor contract provider's compliance with agency standards and that a system of accountability needs to be established for compliance with quality assurance issues and outcomes.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that standards have been developed and implemented to ensure that children are safe in foster care. The standards apply to all paid foster parents (relative or non-relative), and background checks are required for all foster parents.

Item 31. The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures implemented.

____ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

This item was rated an Area Needing Improvement because the State has developed the framework for a statewide quality assurance system, however a fully functioning system is not currently in place.

The state has recently developed policy to mandate regular case reviews, reviews of management reports, quality control reviews at the State level, and corrective action plans. However, this policy has not yet been approved and implemented. DFS relies on a variety of methods to evaluate aspects of the program including voluntary use of the ASFA reviews; Staff Assistance Visits (SAV); and specific reviews conducted by consultants, State auditors, and WYCAPS reports. The state has developed the framework for a statewide systems, however, a fully functioning system is not currently in place.

During the on-site review, stakeholders commenting on this issue reported that there is no formal, comprehensive quality assurance system in place in the State, although one is planned for the future. Stakeholders also indicated that at present, quality assurance efforts are conducted through a variety of mechanisms, including: WYCAPS reports, established policy and procedure, supervisory oversight, and State-level oversight and monitoring.

VII. TRAINING

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2X	3	4

STATUS WITH RESPECT TO TRAINING

Wyoming is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Training. Findings with respect to items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 32. The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services.

____ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Item 32 was rated as an area needing improvement because the State does not have an effective, comprehensive, Department-wide initial training program. Concerns were raised in the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews in regards to the effectiveness of the CORE curriculum which serves as the means of initial training for staff. This is a key finding because staff training and skills-development are related to the quality and effectiveness of casework practice and is supportive of the seven safety and well-being outcomes.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that Rules and Regulations Governing Child Protective Services require that child protective service workers must be trained in the area of child abuse and neglect. Only staff completing the child protective services certification are assigned child protective services responsibilities. Completion of the child protective services certification is defined as having attended and passed the basic child abuse and neglect course, known as CORE. However, a new worker may provide child protective services under the supervision of a certified protective services supervisor/manager prior to completion of the course.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, CORE is the initial training required for all new CPS casework specialists and is offered twice each year. Currently, the course is provided in a 2-week setting. Requirements also include 8 additional hours of compressed video that involves a presenter in a satellite location connected to participating sites. This training concludes with a written test on which a caseworker must score at least 80 percent correct. If the caseworker does not score 80% on the test, they have the opportunity to review areas of weaknesses with a supervisor and retake the exam. Prior to certification, a new casework specialist must successfully complete field experience. During this period, a caseworker's responsibility for direct cases is limited and closely monitored by a supervisor. After completion of CORE, supervisors evaluate a caseworker's job performance based on competencies learned at CORE. Additionally, a sixteen (16) hour training is provided quarterly for WYCAPS users, and another training focuses on the requirements of MEPA as they relate to the performance of a caseworker's responsibilities. A 32-hour training is provided for any casework specialist who will be supervising a juvenile on probation. This training also is offered twice a year and employees must attend within their first year of employment. A training team provides the training at a central location.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State has identified the following areas of where improvements are needed with regard to the DFS staff development and training program:

- The CORE curriculum needs to be updated and expanded.
- The training curriculum needs to be linked to nationally recognized competencies.
- There should be an opportunity for staff to advance their qualifications and expertise through greater access to a Masters of Social Work (MSW) and Juvenile Justice Programs.
- There is a need for on-going training for caseworkers for annual CPS certification.

The Statewide Assessment notes that DFS currently is working collaboratively with the University of Wyoming Social Work Department to develop a training plan and partnership that focuses on best practices and caseworker competencies. DFS also is working with the University of Wyoming and the Federal Regional Office to enhance training dollars through Title IV-E.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue acknowledged that CORE training is required for all CPS staff, but described the following limitations of the current program.

- The current training is not sufficient to meet the needs of caseworkers in performing their job duties.
- The current training does not focus on family-centered practice.
- There is no training manual.
- Probation staff does not participate in CORE training.
- Participation in CORE training is not required prior to receiving a caseload.
- Training is not held often enough.
- There is no CORE training for Home Service Aides.

One strength identified by stakeholders was that Tribes participate in DFS training. Stakeholders also praised DFS' recent efforts to partner with the University of Wyoming to develop training linked to nationally recognized competencies.

Item 33. The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP.

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Item 33 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because DFS does not have an ongoing training program for staff.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS is developing policy for required on-going training for social services staff. Estimates of how much training each full-time employee will be expected to obtain will be included as part of a workload assessment. In addition, DFS is developing a tracking mechanism for training received. DFS intends to use the competencies database to help assess training needs that can be tracked at the worker, district, and State level.

The Statewide Assessment notes that, at present, DFS staff are provided opportunities for staff development to enhance skills and knowledge. They may submit a request to supervisors for approval regarding staff development opportunities that they would like to attend to enhance skills and knowledge. Factors that affect decisions regarding approval of these requests may include such things as budget or workload constraints.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue reported that the State does not require ongoing training for staff and that most workers do not participate in any ongoing training activities. Recently, due to budget restrictions, very few requests for ongoing training that require payment from the agency have been approved. Stakeholders suggested that workload and budget restriction are the primary barriers to workers being able to access ongoing training.

Stakeholders also expressed the opinion that there are many areas where ongoing training is needed, particularly for staff working with developmentally disabled clients, and staff providing independent living and aftercare services. Stakeholders suggested that DFS staff need training in domestic violence, sexual abuse, cultural competency, concurrent planning, ICWA, forensic interviewing, family centered practice, CPS case management, legal issues, and WYCAPS. Stakeholders reported that although DFS staff members are allowed educational leave to attend classes, the State does not have a training contract with the University that subsidizes BSW/MSW education.

Item 34. The State provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E, that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 34 was rated as a Strength because the State provides quality training for foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or approved facilities.

According to the Statewide Assessment, all prospective foster parents must complete a foster parent orientation program prior to certification. During February and March of 2002, representatives from each district were trained in providing the Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE Preservice Training for prospective foster and adoptive parents. This is a 27-hour course designed by the Child Welfare League of America. The Statewide Assessment noted that the use of PRIDE will ensure that a consistent curriculum is provided in each district. At the time of the onsite review (July 2002), the PRIDE training was mandatory for all foster parents as the preservice training, and foster parents also were expected to receive 16 hours of ongoing training annually.

The Statewide Assessment notes that some of the ongoing training is provided by the State's foster parent association. According to the Statewide Assessment, during the past two summers, this organization has provided training by professional trainers on important areas of concern for foster and adoptive parents.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, Wyoming has privatized its adoption program. The Wyoming State Adoption Council recruits and trains prospective adoptive families and private agencies are responsible for providing training and orientation for adoptive families. The Department supports this training by providing grant money for approximately two special needs adoption/foster family trainings. In addition, the majority of adoption placements by DFS are into DFS foster homes. These homes are now provided PRIDE foster care and adoption training.

The State of Wyoming has a certification process that DFS uses for child placement facilities. Part of the process involves the inspection of staff files on the facility site where the training records are kept. Staff members are required to receive an orientation prior to working directly with children. Facilities are required to provide and document in-service training.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue reported that, at the time of the onsite review, PRIDE training is mandatory for all foster parents. Stakeholders expressed the opinion that PRIDE training helps foster parents understand children's development and needs, as well as the effects of abuse and neglect. However, some stakeholders suggested that the PRIDE training is too time-consuming and may discourage people from becoming foster parents. Training also is provided on first-aid and CPR, and 16 hours of ongoing training are required annually.

Stakeholders noted that grant funds are provided to the district offices and the Adoption Council to train, support, and recruit foster parents and foster-adopt parents. A train-the-trainer curriculum was completed for the ten districts and the Reservation. The Adoption Council sponsors an annual Adoption Retreat when they provide training to foster parents and mental health professionals.

VIII. SERVICE ARRAY

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1X	2	3	4

STATUS WITH RESPECT TO SERVICE ARRAY

Wyoming is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of service array. Findings pertaining to the specific items relevant to this factor are presented and discussed below.

Item 35. The State has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency.

____ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Item 35 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because there is an insufficiency of services to meet identified needs, and at times an absence of services.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS provides the services necessary for accomplishing the goals and tasks for children and child to be in need of out-of-home care and the parents are unable to meet the safety and care needs of the child. Family reunification services are directed toward ensuring the child's safety and well being upon their return home. Reunification services such as casework services and family support are provided directly by DFS social service workers and probation officers. DFS purchases a number of services for both the parents and the children in DFS custody from qualified providers when staff does not provide the service directly.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that services are available to make reasonable efforts to prevent placement, when appropriate. Reasonable efforts include both agency-provided services and purchased services. Prevention and intervention services are those services or activities designed to provide early identification and/or timely intervention to support families and prevent or ameliorate

the consequences of abuse or neglect. Such services may also be provided to prevent the removal of a child. Component services and activities may include assessment and/or evaluation of the extent of the problem; counseling, including mental health counseling or therapy as needed; developmental and parenting skills training; respite care; and other services including supervision, case management, and transportation. Independent Living Services are designed to assist youth ages 16 and over that are or have been in out-of-home care. The program is designed to help these youth gain the skills they need to live successfully and self-sufficiently.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue noted that there is a scarcity in the State of professional mental health workers who will accept Medicaid payments, therapeutic foster homes, regular foster homes, Native American foster homes, and juvenile detention centers. They also noted that there is a lack of community-based treatment facilities for youth, which results in a large number of youth being placed in residential treatment facilities, often some distance from their communities.

In addition, stakeholders described a variety of improvements in the service array. They reported that youth providers are collaborating on providing more wraparound services in the community and that significant funds have been allocated to develop drug court, rehabilitation, treatment programs, and staff in the community to address juvenile, as well as adult, substance abuse. Stakeholders indicated that a grant for community-based services has improved services greatly over the past 5 years for at-risk kids. Service providers have a consortium for training and are developing an independent living skills program in collaboration with Casey Family Services and the Link.

Item 36. The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State's CFSP.

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Item 36 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because both the CFSR and the Statewide Assessment determined that access to services is not equal across the State and that services are particularly limited in rural areas.

According to the Statewide Assessment, because of the small population and vast distances between communities, services may be quite a distance from the residence of the family or child. Information collected as part of the State's self-assessment process indicates that many communities lack sufficient options and/or resources to serve children and families. In some communities, the number of service providers is limited, resulting in clients being placed on lengthy waiting lists or having to travel great distances to access services. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, there also is a lack of adequate placement options for children, resulting in children being placed in out-of-home care based on available "beds" rather than on the children's needs. This practice often results in

children being removed from their communities and/or being placed in environments that are more restrictive than necessary to meet the child's needs.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue noted that service availability varies across the State and is particularly problematic in small and rural communities. Stakeholders suggested that small communities often compensate by working together to maximize what is available. Several stakeholders identified the following services as not being accessible on a statewide basis:

- Substance abuse treatment services.
- Mental health services.
- Community-based services for juveniles.
- In-home services, including aftercare.
- Wrap-around services.
- Parenting classes.
- Transportation.
- Respite services.
- Adolescent sex offender services.
- Transitional housing.
- Specialized counseling.
- Legal representation for children in foster care.

Item 37. The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency.

____ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Item 37 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because there is a lack of capacity to tailor services to meet the unique needs of children and families.

According to the Statewide Assessment, there is a need to develop and implement a level of care system that will match the needs of the youth to the services they receive and the services to the cost, thus providing more effective services to more youth. There is also a need to develop a continuum of community-based programs throughout the State that focuses on services to prevent placement or finding the most appropriate placement upon removal from the home.

While some stakeholders commenting on this issue noted that providers can and do individualize services to meet the unique needs of the children and families, other stakeholders suggested that in some cases, services tend to be generic rather than tailored to the unique needs of children and families.

IX. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3	4X

STATUS OF AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

Wyoming is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 38. In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, the State engages in ongoing consultation with tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 38 was rated as a Strength because the CFSR found that DFS is highly responsive to the community.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS has a strong history of coordinating and collaborating with external community resources. The Protective Services Division has traditionally consulted with a variety of community resources and individuals throughout the State. Information is gathered through town hall meetings; public forums; and participants serving on various boards, committees and coalitions. This information is combined with information obtained from members of the planning team for the Five-Year Comprehensive plan for Child Welfare and is used to develop the final CFSP. Members of the original Comprehensive Social Services Planning Team included a legislator, child advocates, a district court judge, education leader, health leader, attorney, child welfare providers, mental health provider, and adoptive and foster parents.

The Comprehensive Social Services Planning Team (CSSPT) also functioned as the Citizen Review Panel and the CAPTA Peer Review Panel for the Children's Trust Fund. Since the completion of the initial plan, the CSSPT continues to focus on Citizen Review Panel issues including policy and reports. These review areas include the Early Childhood Development Council Report, Final Rules for IV-E Foster Care and Eligibility Reviews, a Psychiatric Care Committee, a State Advisory Council on Juvenile Justice Report, CPS Rules, and Child Major Injury/Fatality Review Team Reports. The Panel analyzes data from these reports and uses the analysis and review process to make recommendations to DFS. The Citizen Review Panel selects grants for the Family Preservation and Support grant program and serves as peer reviewers for the Children's Trust Fund grant program.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, stakeholder concerns regarding DFS operations are addressed by the Citizen Review Panel through review and oversight of DFS policy, rules, and regulations during quarterly meetings. In addition, the Citizen Review Panel reviews numerous stakeholders' reports and publications. Some members of the Panel also are members of the Court Improvement Project. This project is working to improve various child welfare issues that relate to the court system.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that DSF collaborates effectively with Tribal representatives. According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS undertakes the following activities to enhance the collaboration with the Tribes.

- Provides advance notification to tribal social services of available caseworker training and pays for tribal social service workers to attend the training.
- Provides technical assistance to tribal social services in areas of program and financial responsibilities.
- Makes sure that if DFS initiates or participates in Statewide innovations or expansions of social services to children and families, it includes tribal social services to the same extent as such innovations, expansions, or funding are available to county DFS offices.

Most stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed praise for the agency's responsiveness to the community and mentioned that DFS has shown considerable improvements in this area. These stakeholders suggested that community involvement and collaboration are now strengths of the agency and that all stakeholders are brought to the table. However, a few stakeholders noted that the relationships among DFS, the courts, and the District Attorney's offices are not as strong as they need to be to ensure that issues pertaining to children's safety and permanency are adequately addressed. Some stakeholders voiced concern that caseworkers do not have sufficient knowledge of the role of the courts and of court procedures.

Item 39. The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered pursuant to the CFSP.

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Item 39 was rated as a Strength because the agency worked with the community representatives in preparing the State's Child and Family Services Plan and in preparing other plans and reports.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue noted that DFS uses feedback from citizens and other stakeholders to develop annual reports of progress.

Item 40. The State's services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population.

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Item 40 was rated as a Strength because the State coordinates its services or benefits with other Federal or Federally-assisted programs serving the same population.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the agency coordinates its services with the following programs:

- The Court Improvement Project, which provides education to the courts on ASFA legislation and the importance of timeliness of permanency hearings.
- The Casey Family Program, which provides adoption placement and services aimed at helping youth move from foster care to adulthood successfully.
- The Adoption Council, which provides adoption placement and training of foster and adoptive parents.
- The Behavioral Health Taskforce work group, which focuses on the provision of quality mental health services for children and families.
- The Dove Council Work group, which is designed to affect policy, education and coordination of services for domestic violence victims and their children.
- The Juvenile Justice Advisory Council work group, which focuses on developing standards and guidelines for juvenile detention facilities.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that there is a need for improved services coordination in several areas, including health, education, and mental health. Stakeholders suggested that DFS needs to establish Memorandum of Understanding with various agencies that allow information to be shared across agencies in a manner that adequately addresses confidentiality concerns but also enhances the protection and care of children. Despite these concerns, stakeholders noted that the State has been effective in using funds from the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program to provide domestic violence training and

build shelters for victims of domestic violence. DSF coordination with the Court Improvement Project was identified by several stakeholders as particularly noteworthy.

X. FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3X	4

STATUS WITH REGARD TO FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION

Wyoming is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. Findings for the items pertaining to this factor are presented below.

Item 41. The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions which are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 41 was rated as a Strength because the State has implemented standards that address safety, health, sanitation, and child well being.

According to the Statewide Assessment, certification standards adopted by the Department of Family Services have allowed the Department to be more effective in establishing and maintaining standards for foster homes, adoptive homes, and child care institutions. Standards have been developed based on a level of care system starting with the least restrictive, i.e., family foster care, and graduating to most restrictive, i.e., residential child care institutions. Each level will be required to meet the minimum standards of family foster care, with additional requirements based on the level of care provided.

The Statewide Assessment notes the following needs regarding foster home licensing:

- New foster care regulations need to be completed and implemented.
- There needs to be a foster care coordinator in each district of the State.

- Incentives need to be provided to keep successful, quality foster parents, i.e., increase payment and improved training.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue noted that the State has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions that address critical areas such as health, safety, and sanitation. They noted that DFS has rules and policies for the certification of foster homes, including criminal background checks, references, abuse/neglect checks, home studies and required training. Stakeholders expressed the opinion that facilities are held to high standards and that the licensing and certification process is thorough. They also noted that foster homes are recertified annually and re-licensure occurs on a timely basis.

Item 42. The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 42 was rated as a Strength because the standards are applied equally to children placed in foster care and relative foster care placements receiving title IV-E funds.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State office is responsible for monitoring compliance, certification, and approval in childcare institutions and child placing agencies. A social services consultant from the State office makes annual on-site visits to childcare institutions throughout the State using a standardized review document. Each visit consists of a physical site inspection, review of personnel files, policy and procedure review, child file review, and interviews with staff and residents. Additionally, caseworkers are required to report any concerns of non-compliance with any regulation to the State consultant.

Currently, certification procedures are being reviewed for DFS family foster homes. Local DFS offices are responsible for the recruitment, certification and compliance of family foster homes and adoptive homes. The State office provides consultation concerning compliance issues and resources to assist with the recruitment and certification of foster homes. Adoptive homes and foster-adopt homes where children are already placed in the State custody are certified and monitored by private adoption agencies or local DFS offices.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, to ensure certification standards are applied equally, DFS local offices have designated a primary contact person(s), generally a caseworker, responsible for the recruitment, certifying, and monitoring of foster homes. Quality Assurance reviews of foster parent files are conducted routinely by local offices. Each local office is responsible for assuring foster homes are in compliance with current standards. The monitoring process includes, but is not limited to, on-site inspections and evaluations. Yearly recertification of foster homes requires a complete review of the foster home status. This review includes a new application, home study update, and review of placements, training records, and other certification requirements.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue reported that standards are applied to all licensed foster family homes and child care institutions receiving State and or Federal funds.

Item 43. The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children.

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Item 43 was rated as a Strength because the State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances.

According to the Statewide Assessment, local offices make the request for criminal background checks on potential foster parents, adoptive parents, and care providers. The State office, reporting the results back to the local office or private agencies requesting the check, completes the actual “check”. Compliance with this requirement is mandatory and assured through the Quality Assurance case file review process and the yearly recertification process of foster homes and child care institutions. The State Office monitors the compliance of private agencies responsible for the approval of foster homes/adoptive homes. This is verified at the time of the yearly review.

In May 2001, DFS participated in the required IV-E audit. This audit included a random sample of foster and adoptive homes statewide. One of the requirements for successful completion of this audit was that foster and adoptive files contained criminal background check information. This information was found to be in all of the randomly selected files.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue agreed that the State requires foster and adoptive parents to complete a criminal background check as part of the licensing process. The background check must be acceptable before a license can be issued. Stakeholders confirmed that annual background checks are required for re-licensing of foster parents.

Item 44. The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Item 44 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because there is no structured statewide process to ensure aggressive recruitment

of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State.

According to the Statewide Assessment, DFS district offices are responsible for the recruitment, licensing and approval, and compliance of family foster homes and adoptive homes. Caseworkers are expected to be familiar with the State of Wyoming Comprehensive Plan, which includes foster parent recruitment. The expectation is for every DFS employee to be a recruiter for foster parents. The State office provides consultation concerning resources to assist with the recruitment and approval of foster homes. A statewide foster home recruitment, licensing and training program is being implemented utilizing PRIDE training.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that the State uses advertising in individual communities to recruit foster and adoptive parents, including local television ads, cable announcements, and newspaper ads. DFS has an open door policy whereby potential foster or adoptive parents can go to a district office and immediately speak with a caseworker regarding being a foster or adoptive parent and complete an application for consideration.

The Wyoming State Adoption Council has been supported in their recruitment efforts by the Department's IV-B Plan for the past 3 years. The council received a grant of \$45,000 in November of 2001 through the Community Based Family Preservation and Support funds. A portion of the IV-B Preserving Safe and Stable Families funds received provides a grant to the Wyoming State Adoption Council for the purpose of recruiting minority foster and adoptive families. Currently, Wyoming DFS is participating in a joint recruitment effort with the Wyoming State Adoption Council. DFS has purchased updated recruitment videos from Hennepin County Children, Family and Adult Services Department from the State of Minnesota. The public announcements will be used to recruit diverse families for foster care, adoption, and foster adopt families.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, recruitment efforts are made on an ongoing basis to secure culturally diverse and minority foster homes. The Department contracts with Tribal social services in Hot Springs and Fremont County where 64 percent of the State's Naive American population resides. DFS seeks to place Native American children with Native American families whenever possible.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that there are not enough foster homes in the State and that the existing foster family homes do not reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of the children in foster care. Most stakeholders noted that the State does not have a formal recruitment program and that more energy needs to be put into foster care recruitment. Although stakeholders stated that recruitment efforts vary from office to office, they suggested that most offices tend to rely on "word of mouth" as a recruitment strategy, which stakeholders did not feel was sufficient to ensure recruitment of an adequate number of foster families.

One stakeholder reported that a grant is provided to each district for recruitment of foster homes and minority foster homes, and that various recruitment methods are used. Another stakeholder reported that the agency is attempting to enhance recruitment by

developing local recruitment coordinators, implementing PRIDE training, running public service announcements in the mass media, and encouraging the development of foster care associations.

Item 45. The State has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

This item was rated as a Strength because the State has implemented several initiatives to enhance cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.

According to the Statewide Assessment, when a child becomes free for adoption or is likely to be free for adoption, the worker sends the child's profile and photograph to the State adoption consultant. The child's profile is then mailed to the certified adoption agencies in the State of Wyoming. If the agencies have no matches, the worker is encouraged to prepare the child's profile for the Adoption Exchange in Denver. Information on the child also is placed on the DFS web site. In November 2001, a child and worker flew to Denver so the waiting child could be aired on "Wednesday's Child" on Colorado and Utah television stations.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that Wyoming is a member of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children. This allows for a smooth transfer of a foster child to another State when the ultimate goal is adoption. In September 2001, all social service staff were provided with a manual written by the National Adoption Center and entitled: *Placing Children Across Geographic Boundaries: A Step-by-Step Guide for Social Workers*.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that the State is effective in using cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive and permanent placements for children and that the majority of adoptions are out-of-State. Stakeholders also noted that DSF uses resources such as the internet, Wednesday's Child, and other available forms of advertising to locate families across jurisdictions that may be interested in adopting available children. However, stakeholders reported that Wyoming is not a member State of the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance.

XI. DETERMINATION OF SUBSTANTIAL CONFORMITY

For each outcome and systemic factor listed below, mark “Y” where the State is determined to be in substantial conformity and “N” where the State is determined not to be in substantial conformity. For each outcome or systemic factor marked “N,” place a check beside the performance indicator, listed by item number in this form, that has been determined to be an area needing improvement.

Outcomes

I. Safety

N Outcome S1

x Item 1

x Item 2

N Outcome S2

x Item 3

x Item 4

II. Permanency

N Outcome P1

 Item 5

x Item 6

x Item 7

x Item 8

x Item 9

x Item 10

N Outcome P2

 Item 11

x Item 12

x Item 13

x Item 14

x Item 15

x Item 16

III. Child and Family Well-Being

N Outcome WB1

x Item 17

x Item 18

x Item 19

x Item 20

N Outcome WB2

x Item 21

N Outcome WB3

x Item 22

x Item 23

Systemic Factors

IV. Y Statewide Information System

 Item 24

V. N Case Review System

x Item 25

 Item 26

x Item 27

x Item 28

x Item 29

VI. Y Quality Assurance System

 Item 30

x Item 31

VII. N Training

x Item 32

x Item 33

 Item 34

VIII. N Service Array

x Item 35

x Item 36

x Item 37

IX. Y Agency Responsiveness to the Community

 Item 38

 Item 39

 Item 40

X. Y Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

 Item 41

 Item 42

 Item 43

 Item 44

 Item 45